Indian Tales of Love and Beauty

Josephine Ransom

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BY

JOSEPHINE RANSOM

WITH A FOREWORD BY

ANNIE BESANT

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FOREWORD

I VERY gladly recommend this book of stories of Indian women to the reading public. There is a deathless charm about the old-world heroines, Maitrēyī and Sāvitrī, the one showing how a woman may rise to philosophic heights of thought, the other how a woman's love can face and conquer the terrible King of Death, wiling from him his prey. The tale of the Buddhist missionary, Saṅghamitta, who carried the Word of the Lord Buddha to Ceylon, is less well known in the West, and we are glad that Mrs. Ransom has included this pearl in her chaplet. No land has given to humanity sweeter and stronger types of womanhood than has the land of Ind, and to tell of the women of the past is to inspire the women of the present, and to shape the women of the future.

That this little book may bring knowledge to the West and inspiration to the East is the hope of its writer's friend.

ANNIE BESANT

INTRODUCTION

THE painter presents visions in colour, the sculptor embodies dreams in marble, the writer clothes thoughts in words, and the lover extols the moods and charms of the beloved. Each surrenders to the world's scrutiny the most intimate emotions, aspirations, hopes and ideals, trusting thus to win for them some meed of attention, perhaps of appreciation.

In the pages that follow I strive to play the lover's part in limning the beloved—the Women of the Motherland. I limn them as I see them in their beauty, faith, courage and devotion, and in their charm and enchantment. I prefer, of course to show only their virtues, but at times justice compels me to put in shadows also—the picture would not otherwise be complete. But, as the great Kālidās has said:

> A lotus even though covered with moss is charming; even the dark spot heightens the beauty of the moon.

It was Mrs. Besant who, as long ago as 1905, first introduced me to the study of Indian women—a truly fascinating study, full of human interest, and of value to all who want really to understand the feminine nature in all its phases.

The few women whose stories appear in these pages do not by any means comprise all those who are celebrated for one reason or another. I have counted at least one hundred well-known names—some of them immortal. They include those of women of the very far past, for among them were those who helped in composing parts of the ancient Veḍic songs—earliest Scriptures of the Hinḍūs. Among them will be found also great mathematicians, profound philosophers, highly trained astrologers, Queens, great in statecraft or in war, some just delightful womanly women, a few renowned for some great sacrifice—like Kṛshṇā Kumāri—some for a fatal mistake—like Kaikeyī—or, more rarely, for some vice.

The story of Sīṭā I have not included because it is so well known. She is the 'peerless' woman to the Hinḍū, and of her Milton's words ring true—

. . . for something in thy face did shine above mortality, that showed thou wast divine.

To represent the ancient days I have given instead stories I and II. In story I the stately language of the Upaniṣhaḍs has been preserved as far as possible, especially in the replies of Yājñavalkya. It is of interest to note how the great women of the past took their place in public and were honoured. Stories III and IV are of special types of devotees—women to whom Religion was everything and the world nothing. In III the quaint phraseology of the 1837

translation of the *Mahāwanso* has been almost entirely retained. The incidents (whether accurate or not matters little because even when 'accretions' are allowed for there will still be a certain basis of truth in them) that surrounded the youth of the priestess Saṅghamiṭṭa are told at length in order to give some idea of the fervour for Buḍḍhism which helped to make the famous priestess what she was. Stories V and VI afford glimpses of the wonderful Rājpuṭ women of only a few centuries ago. They were so very brave and fearless! Stories VII and VIII reveal the Musalmān women of a strange period in Indian history. Nūr Jehān was of course the best known of them all, but her story has been told and retold so often that it is not included here. Story IX is an example of one of the very noblest types of Hiṇḍū women, one not altogether unknown even in recent times; for Rāṇi Sahib Kour of Patiālā was a remarkable Prime Minister, and the name of Mahārāṇī Jhindan, wife of Ranjīṭ Singh of the Punjāb, is still fresh in the minds of her people. The era of the great Marātha Queen was nearly analogous to that of the Elizabethan in England. Stories X and XI will appeal as being familiar types, not in India alone, but throughout the world. This proves more effectively than anything else could, how Indian women are not strange creatures apart from the womanhood of the world, but that they share equally with the women of

all nations their strength and their weakness. Story XII, founded on fact, is specially meant to show how the modern Indian woman is true to the traditions, the character, of her past.

All the stories have an historical basis, but at the present day there are many versions to each. For this book that sequence of events has been chosen which seemed the most reasonable. Sometimes several versions have been blended. In every story an effort has been made to present a fair idea of the conditions existing at the time in order " to put the living aspect of past things " before our eyes.

Much ignorance about Indian women prevails practically everywhere outside India. To try and dispel some of it is the purpose of this book. I hope that in the characters treated I have made it abundantly clear that Indian women are not, as a rule, hidden, badly-treated and incomprehensible mysteries ; but are mostly loveable, delightful human beings, even if they do throb in their own special way to the pulse of life. Also it will be granted that the truly great among them realised, as has every noble woman of whatever nationality, that

The path of duty is the way to glory.

Adyar, 1911. J. R.

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INDIAN SCENERY

MAITṚĒYĪ, THE ASCETIC

It was long, long ago in Janakpūr—that is, the city of Janaka, one of the great 'King-Sages'. Early one glorious summer morning three people were travelling towards the city. Two of them were armed after the fashion of the famous Kṣhaṭṭriyas of olden times, but who have long since vanished from the Motherland. They carried the heavy bows and arrows that needed a giant's strength to wield them, and massive sheathed swords hung at their waists. They were warriors trained to an ancient, but for those days a perfect, art of war, where courtesy was the first requirement. The third person wore very imple robes and was of grave and dignified mien. He was Sage Miṭra, trusty minister to Janaka, returning from some delicate mission.

One of the warriors, Yajñadaṭṭa, had been away to Benares and so had missed the great Yajña (sacrifice) performed by Janaka. For, says the old Upaniṣhaṭ:

Janaka, the King of the Viḍehas, performed the sacrifice named Bahuḍakṣhiṇa (great gifts). There were assembled the Brāhmaṇas of the Kurus and the Pāñchālas. Janaka, the King of the Viḍehas, had a

great desire to know who among those Brāhmaṇas knew best the Veḍas; for this purpose he tied a thousand cows (in a stable); the horns of each of them were surrounded with ten Pāḍahs (of gold).

"Ah," said Vishṇumiṭra, the other warrior, "what a pity you were absent; never was there such a Yajña, nor such wisdom displayed. All our greatest spoke, but best of all were the brilliant questions of Gārgī and Yājñavalkya's answers to them."

"Had they any settled subject to discuss?" asked Yajñaḍaṭṭa, "and upon what did Gārgī question him?"

"No, there was no special subject, and the range of questions was very wide and many were very subtle. Gārgī put her questions upon the immanence of Brahman.[1] Some day I will relate it all in detail to you . . . The replies of Yājñavalkya were profound and perfect," he finished enthusiastically.

"What a pity," said Miṭra, shaking his head sadly, "that there has been any difference of opinion between him and Vaishampāyana. Now Vaishampāyana's rendering of the Yajurveḍa[2] will ever be known as the 'Black Veḍa'—it seems so confused—while Yājñavalkya's (with which I am helping him) will certainly be clear, and therefore will be known as the 'White Veḍa'."

[1] The Supreme, the Absolute.

[2] The Knowledge of Sacrifice.

"But tell me," said Yajñadatta, "why was Yājñavalkya questioned so closely?"

"Near to the place of meeting," said Mitra, "the King had enclosed a thousand cows, and their horns were thickly encased with gold. The King said to the meeting: 'O venerable Brāhmaṇas, he amongst you who is the best knower of Brahman, shall drive home these cows.' No Brāhmaṇa ventured forth. Then did Yājñavalkya say to his Brahma-student—'O gentle one, drive these cows home,'—which the disciple did. Then were the other Brāhmaṇas annoyed, for they thought: 'How dare he call himself best knower of Brahman?' At last Ashvala, King Janaka's Hotar,[1] asked him: 'Art thou such in truth, O Yājñavalkya?' But Yājñavalkya subtly gave reply: 'To him who is best knower we bow, but we are desirous of the cows.' Then Ashvala questioned him, and others also, but he silenced them all . . . 'Tis marvellous in one so young, for he is but thirty."

"It must indeed have been a remarkable meeting," said Yajñadatta, "but now let us return to my question, O Mitra; what is it that makes you look so anxious?"

"I am anxious," replied Mitra gravely, "because of my daughter Maitrēyī. She is eighteen years old and she should be married. But I have not been able to arrange anything."

[1] He who prepares the sacrifices.

"You astonish me," exclaimed Vishṇumitra, "for your daughter is beautiful and accomplished—and so well educated. Why, we all say that she will be as great a scholar and orator as her aunt Gārgi. What is the difficulty?"

"Just that very education," answered Mitra. "Yājñavalkya comes, as you know, every day to my house to work upon his compilation of the Yajurveda. We discuss all kinds of metaphysical subjects—we delight in them. Gārgi too is often there, and Maitrēyi follows her—she even attended the great meeting with Gārgi, but she sat with the other ladies while Gārgi sat in the circle of the most honoured. She says also that she will either be a celibate like her aunt—or she will marry Yājñavalkya!"

"But will not Yājñavalkya be glad to accept your daughter?" asked Yajñadatta.

"Ah yes, but you see he has already an ideal wife in Kaṭyāyani"—said Mitra. "She is so beautiful and modest, manages her home so perfectly and is so reverent that Yājñavalkya is entirely devoted to her. It might disturb their happiness if he married a second time. The only thing is that Kaṭyāyani takes little interest in intricate and subtle metaphysics—she loves better the household cares and the management of the children—perhaps," he mused, "perhaps after all there would be a place for Maitrēyi in his home, the place that Kāṭyāyani leaves unfilled."

They were now passing through some jungle, and suddenly Mitra was aware that on the top of a near hillock a man stood, wrapt in meditation. To his horror he saw a huge tiger creep from the undergrowth intent upon stalking the still figure. With a sharp exclamation he pointed to what was happening. Instantly the Kshattriyas strung their bows, and simultaneously their arrows pierced the eyes of the savage beast, two more in its body ended its struggles. But its howls of pain had roused the solitary man from his meditation. It was Yājñavalkya! Seeing what had happened he came quickly forward to express his gratitude.

From that time onward Mitra and Yājñavalkya were even greater friends than before, and, as a consequence, the ladies of the two families came into closer contact with each other.

Kātyāyanī was a little older than Maitrēyī, and her opposite in everything. She was a delightful warm-hearted woman, full of tenderness, love and sympathy for every one. To her husband she was a dear companion, and she was wholly devoted to him and to her two children. But, much as she loved and reverenced her husband, she found it a task to follow his dissertations upon the abstruse themes in which he delighted.

Maitrēyī was a reserved and silent girl, speaking little save to discuss some grave topic; she loved but

few though those few were loved intensely. Gaiety and merry-making left her unresponsive; instead of joining in the careless joys of youth she spent long hours absorbed in deep studies. But she and Kāṭyāyanī were warm friends—each supplied what the other lacked—and Kātyāyanī greatly admired her quiet clever friend. She rather dreaded the idea that Maitrēyī should marry; she knew how household matters absorbed one's time. One day she spoke out her fears to Maitrēyī, but Maitrēyī only smiled.

"Perhaps," she said quietly, "I shall not marry at all."

"What!" exclaimed Kātyāyanī in a shocked voice, "not marry! Oh, please don't be a Brahmachāriṇi[1]—domestic life is a woman's true sphere. Everything is included in it: religion and all that it involves."

"Is domesticity a woman's sole Ḍharma?" asked Maitrēyī. "Is it not an equally important duty to devote oneself to the acquirement of Self-Knowledge?"

"Ah yes," said Kātyāyanī, "but few women are at all capable of such, they have not the time—and, besides, that is a man's duty."

A sudden deep look in Maitrēyī's eyes showed that a sensitive chord had been touched.

[1] A woman vowed to celibacy.

"Do you then think," she asked slowly, "that the Self exists in men only, or in women too?"

"Oh, in women too, of course," replied Kātyāyanī laughingly, "there's no difference. And I know from what Yājñavalkya has explained to me that before liberation must come Self-Knowledge."

"Then," said Maitrēyī earnestly, "why should people say so thoughtlessly that to men only—with rare exceptions of women like Gārgī—belongs the right to seek Self-Knowledge. It is not enough to immerse oneself in domestic duties and regard them as the sole purport of life. To attain is the goal of men and women alike. Ah, Kātyāyanī, take advantage of your wonderful opportunity, learn from your wise husband; such as he are few indeed, for most men are but pleasure-seekers, and care little for the serene and deep pleasures of knowledge!"

When she returned home Kātyāyanī thought often of what Maitrēyī had said. Suddenly it flashed upon her what a splendid thing it would have been had Maitrēyī and Yājñavalkya married . . . She hinted it to others, to see what their opinion would be—to her surprise she found that they thought so too! Then came a struggle for Kātyāyanī: could she endure sharing her loved husband even with Maitrēyī, her dearest friend? Long and earnestly she questioned herself, and in the end courageously decided that a union between her husband and

Maitrēyī would certainly be to the advantage of both. They could satisfy each other's intellect, could urge each other to those heights which she could not dream of scaling.

She spoke to Yājñavalkya; she told him frankly all her doubts, her struggles, her decision . . . He hesitated.

"But," he said doubtfully, "are you sure, quite sure, that you would not mind—that I shall not love Maitrēyī more than you?"

"Nay," replied Kātyāyanī, with a happy little smile, "you cannot love her more than you love me; you will love her differently, that is all . . . And Maitrēyī, though reserved and meditative, is very lovable. Besides, have you not told me so often: 'Behold, not indeed for the husband's sake the husband is dear, but for the sake of the Self is dear the husband. Behold, not indeed for the wife's sake the wife is dear, but for the sake of the Self is dear the wife.'"

A little later the marriage took place. And thereafter all three lived happily together. Maitrēyī was more than content not to encroach upon Kātyāyanī's established place in the household. She was supremely happy to be with Yājñavalkya, following the flight of his thought, sharing his meditations, listening with deep pleasure to his superb analyses of philosophy, his luminous expositions of

universal bases, his unravellings of the cryptic statements of the ancient books.

Many evenings, when Kātyāyanī too was at liberty, they sat in the fragrant gṛha.[1] Maitrēyī would open the conversation with some leading question upon a problem that puzzled her. One evening in particular Maitrēyī was eager for an exposition upon the 'unity of the Self'. But Kātyāyanī wanted first to know what was the 'Self'.

Beginning there Yājñavalkya led her from point to point—showed her that the Self is 'consciousness'. That the Self is not 'mind' alone—which can be aware and unaware of objects, changeful; but that the Self is true awareness of *itself*, that is of the full content of consciousness. Beyond the mind that cognises is the Inner Ruler. Then he went on, chanting in the exquisite Samskṛt of old, these immortal words: "Unseen he sees, unheard he hears, unminded he minds, unknown he knows. There is none that sees but he, there is none that hears but he, there is none that minds but he, there is none that knows but he. He is thy soul, the Inner Ruler, immortal. Whatever is different from him is perishable."

Thus they talked far into the night, till Kātyāyanī's pretty head drooped sleepily and she said she could listen no longer. Then she and

[1] Meditation room

Yājñavalkya retired, but Maitrēyī sat on keeping vigil with the stars, while her thought plunged deep into the things that Yājñavalkya had expounded.

There were other things that she wanted to know, especially about the Individual and the Universal Self.

"The Universal Self," explained Yājñavalkya, in his luminous way, "is neither of time nor of eternity. The changes that we experience are changes in the mind, as I have told you; likewise cosmic mind experiences cosmic changes. The Universal Self is the great indestructible, unchanging witness of all. In some way, unknown as yet, this Self has an agent, the individual self, which is ignorant of change and must realise it . . . Its essence is One with the Universal Self, but its content is of time and space. In individual self is the *organ* of Truth, the Universal Self *is* the Truth, he is the Truth."

So fled many serene days. Yājñavalkya's Vedic School flourished. He grew old and full of years and wisdom. Maitrēyī followed closely in his footsteps, gaining point after point, and devoting herself utterly to the mastery of knowledge, and the realisation of Truth . . . She meditated fearlessly upon the great teachings of her husband, wresting from them their full purport, and for herself she knew the transcendent joy of communion with her higher

Self . . . Having no worldly duties to distract her, she plunged into the intense struggle of Self against the world—and won.

"Maitrēyī," said Yājñavalkya one day, "behold, I am desirous of raising myself from the order of householder, let me divide my property between thee and Kātyāyanī."

"If," answered Maitrēyī, "this whole world with all its wealth were mine, could I become immortal thereby?"

"Nay," replied Yājñavalkya, "by wealth there is no hope of obtaining immortality."

"Then of what use would wealth be to me," returned Maitrēyī. "Tell me, O Muni, any means of obtaining immortality of which thou knowest."

"I will explain to thee the means," said Yājñavalkya. "Try and comprehend my explanation: For the sake of the Self are all things dear, from our immediate circle of loved ones to the wide expanse of the encircling universe. When all things disappear only Brahman remains, as ever. There is no duality; the Self is of the nature of Brahman and is immortal. This Brahman is verily the lord of all beings, the King of all beings. As all spokes are fastened in the nave and in the circumference of the wheel, thus also all beings, all gods, all worlds, all organs, all souls, are fastened in that Self. He sleeps in all bodies; it is Brahman who has not a Before nor an After, not a

Beside nor a Without ; this is the Self, the perceiver of all. So far, O beloved Maitrēyī, extends in truth immortality."

Very soon afterwards Yājñavalkya took up the third state, that of 'dweller in the forest,' devoting his time utterly to the attainment of Truth. His eldest son took charge of the home. Maitrēyī remained with the family, giving out in beauty of life and teaching the precious knowledge that the Sage had helped her to gain. Thus engaged her life closed in peace and honour. A great and abiding content was Maitrēyī's for she had realised much of Truth, and the path of immortality stretched clear before her earnest and illumined soul.

MAYST THOU BE AS SĀVIṬRĪ

Ashvapaṭi, King of the Mādras, had no children. He had prayed and prayed to the Gods—so had his Queen—but no answer had come; not even the accumulated blessings of many Brāhmaṇas had been of any avail. Then the King vowed himself to austerities . . . Year after year passed—eighteen years of unremitting penances! and then his wife gave birth to a sweet girl-babe.

So glad, so grateful were the aged King and Queen for their dear wee child. They poured out upon her a love that knew no limits. They surrounded her with tender guidance, watching over her joyously as she grew.

The years passed and Sāvitrī was a maiden grown. The old books tell of her glad girlhood, tell how in those far Indian days maids knew not the stifling purdah system. They enjoyed a merry freedom. To gather wisdom they frequented the hermitages of the great reverend sages who are the real marvel of India's past, who left as heritage the priceless pearls of wisdom that are the glory even of our own day.

Sāvitṛī grew up healthy, lovely, wise and pure. It was time for her to marry. Her parents sought everywhere for a suitable husband, but it proved strangely difficult to find one. King Ashvapaṭi grew anxious, for the old saying haunted him :

"The father that doth not bestow his daughter cometh by disgrace."

He talked over it long with the Queen, but at last she begged him to leave it in the hands of the Gods—those Gods who had answered their prayers and had sent them their lovely daughter, and who doubtless had some special plan for her which they would reveal in their own good time.

And so Savitṛī went on happily. But one day as she went as usual to the hermits' abode, on the way she saw some youths intent upon their games. She had often seen them ; they were the sons of the hermits or their pupils. There was a new one among them though, whom she had not seen before. He was tall and supple, and was of a fine and royal presence. His handsome face drew Sāvitṛī's eyes lingeringly. Their eyes met, and their hearts knew each its lover.

Sāvitṛī went on to the hermitage. When her instruction was over she lingered, for she much wanted to ask her teacher about the youth whom she had seen.

Being wise, the sage knew what was occupying the thoughts of his beautiful pupil. He encouraged her

to speak. Shyly she questioned him and he told her the boy's whole story: He was only son to Ḍyumaṭsena, who was of noble race, and erstwhile ruler over the Sālwas. But Ḍyumaṭsena was old and blind—so greedy hands had clutched his throne. He and his Queen, carrying their little Saṭyavān, had wandered many sad years, and now they had come to live as hermits, a simple, pure life, and the prince, their son, supported them by homely labour cheerfully done.

Dreaming rosy day-dreams Sāvitrī wended her way home. At once she sought out her mother, and poured out all to her, confessing the sweet captivity of her heart. The King and Queen consulted long, but felt they could do but little till they understood fully who this boy might be. They called Nāraḍa, Nāraḍa the Wise, to whom the world is as an open book—past, present, future,—from him nothing hid or secret. They told all the story to Nāraḍa.

"Nay, child," he said, shaking his head: "Nay, choose not thus. It cannot be!"

"But why?" begged Sāvitrī. "There is no wrong in him."

But Nāraḍa would not answer.

Then the King questioned him closely:

"Has Saṭyavān no energy?"

"Aye, like to the sun himself."

"Lacks he in wisdom?"

"Nay, for his wisdom is as the wisdom of the Teacher of the Gods."

"Brave?"

"Indra is no braver."

"Doth he forgive?"

"Yea, even as doth mother earth."

"Is he not handsome?"

"Rival is he to the twin Ashvins."

"What, O Nārada, is his character?"

"He is humble, truthful, controlled; of his conduct there is never complaint; and honour is his crowning virtue."

"Then, O wise one, where the difficulty?"

"Alas, alas!" said Nārada reluctantly, "he has but one short year to live—then Sāvitrī, thy sweet maid, will be a widow."

The King was shocked. He begged Sāvitrī to forget Satyavān; her mother wept and prayed her to wait a while, perhaps she might love another.

"Mother mine," said Sāvitrī, "my heart is given, can I take it back? A Hindū maid may not love twice. I have selected my husband; to do so twice would brand me a wanton. If Satyavān I cannot wed, then a maid I must remain."

Nārada blessed her for her love and faith; and her father said she should marry where she loved . . . He gathered together priests and counsellors and all

went to where Saṭyavān and his parents had their humble abode in the woods.

The blind old King was astonished when he heard the reason of this sudden visit—but Saṭyavān rejoiced for his heart was Sāviṭrī's utterly.

"But," said the blind King sadly, "we are exiles."

"That makes no difficulty," replied King Ashvapaṭi quietly.

"We have but a poor rude hut in which to dwell," said Dyumaṭsena, "and a palace has ever sheltered Sāviṭrī, and luxury surrounded her all her life—can she endure the change?"

Sāviṭrī only smiled. Where her husband could live, there surely was fit dwelling for her too!

Then and there the marriage ceremony took place, with the sweet-voiced birds of the glade for choristers, and the delicious perfumes of the forest flowers for incense.

When it was over and King Ashvapaṭi and his attendants had gone back to the city, Sāviṭrī quietly took off her splendid dress and clad herself in the simple rough garments that the hermits wore.

She devoted herself entirely to her new life. She was so willing to serve and aid, was so clever in all that the household life demanded that every one loved her. Saṭyavān adored her.

Twelve months had almost gone by. And as the fateful time drew near Nāraḍa's words recurred more

and more vividly to Sāvitrī's mind . . . She could not tell anyone of the dread that was upon her, she could devise no way for Satyavān's escape from death ; she could only pray and pray.

Only four days more remained and still no answer to her prayers. Sāvitrī felt desperate. She would leave nothing undone that might avert the evil fate. She took the Trirātra vow—for three days and nights no food should pass her lips. When the others expostulated she gently begged to be allowed her own way. The dreaded day came! . . . Sāvitrī kept close to her husband's side.

"We are in need of wood," said Satyavān cheerily, "I will go and gather some."

He took his axe to go out, and Sāvitrī followed close.

"Ah, loved one," he cried, "the way is rough and will bruise thy feet. And thou art faint with fasting!"

The elders gathered too and urged her not to go ; but with sweet determination Sāvitrī won her way. Together they went into the forest and Sāvitrī sat down and watched her husband ply his axe swiftly and surely. At times Satyavān stopped to talk to her. He told her of his love—how it flowed ever like the streams, and how her beauty was as fragrant as the lovely forest flowers . . . Sāvitrī was happy in his love, but ever in her mind echoed Nārada's ominous words: "He has but one short year to

live!" She watched and prayed that the evil hour might be averted—and yet she wondered in what form Death might come; she dreaded that the flashing axe might slip and thus be his weapon.

Suddenly Saṭyavān's hearty strokes ceased. He staggered, pale and chill. Sāviṭrī sprang to him as he fell! She sat down and drew his head upon her lap.

"My head," he moaned, "it is afire."

"Keep still, dear one," entreated Sāviṭrī, "perhaps the pain will pass."

"'Tis growing dark Sāviṭrī—the pain! ah, the pain—"

"Perhaps but a swoon," whispered Sāviṭri, "it will pass." She folded her soft arms close about him.

"Nay, my Sāviṭrī, 'tis death—farewell dear one—O Gods; what meaneth this—ah—"

Sāviṭrī held him closer yet . . . Lo! her eyes were 'love-opened'. A great and awesome Being approached, majestic, robed in scarlet, a flashing diadem upon his brows. He was dark of hue, and his red eyes blazed. Upon Saṭyavān he fixed them; and Sāviṭrī saw that in his hands he held a noose.

She gently laid her husband on the soft green sward, then rose trembling and made deep obeisance to the dread strange Being.

"Who art thou," she asked in low awed tones, "why hast thou come?"

"Yama[1] am I," answered the Being with the deep voice of mystery and things unknown to mortals, "for thy husband I have come—his time is fulfilled."

Then Sāvitrī saw Yama draw Satyavān's soul, 'of the measure of the thumb,' from out his body, and bind it with the noose. Then he turned with it and went quickly away southward, towards his own realm . . . And Sāvitri followed.

Death turned and saw her and was surprised.

"Go back, child, go back," he said, "the dead thou must not follow. Thou must live, and be the order of thy life as the Shāstras show."

"Husband and wife may not dwell apart," Sāvitrī answered, "even than thee, O mighty one, the marriage bond is stronger. Darkness, terrors, come what will, my husband I must follow."

So they went on, Sāvitrī hurrying meekly, patiently, in the swift strides of Death. Truly was the way hard and toilsome, but Sāvitrī never heeded aught save keeping her husband's soul in sight. At last her endurance touched the stern strong heart of Death; he offered her a boon for whom she would—but she must not ask for Satyavān.

"Give, O Death," she begged humbly, "to my husband's aged father his lost sight, restore also to him his own fair kingdom."

[1] God of Death.

"Thus shall it be, fair child," granted Death. "And now turn back, the way is drear and cold and rough for thy tender form; see, thy feet, how they bleed! The aged ones at home need thy ministering presence; go, for duty calls thee."

But Sāvitrī held on her stumbling way, heedless of bruise and smart, or of creeping horrors—she would not lose her husband's soul.

Again Death turned, and with softened voice bade her return, for the terrors increased and the darkness grew.

"Yama, Conqueror, art thou truly called," returned Sāvitrī, "but in truth thou art a loving friend to all; and wert thou understood of all, men would hail thee as hail sick souls the light."

Then was Death touched. He offered her another boon—not her husband's life. She asked that her father, King Ashvapaṭi, might have other children, that his house might never cease to rule fair Maḍra. 'Twas granted.

"Now return—the way is beset with fears, and is not for thee."

But she went on till Death grew pitiful for her and was won by her wondrous love and courage. One more boon he offered her, and this time no exception made. Quickly Sāvitrī saw the hope and chance.

"I would one hundred sons," she prayed, with folded hands, "that my life be not lonely, but glad and full of joy."

"'Tis unto thee as thou wouldst," said Death, "and may the blessings of the Gods be upon thee."

But she did not turn back—though her weeping was less hopeless.

"What!" exclaimed Death, "thou little foolish one, go back—or it may not be well for thee!"

"But, O mighty God, thou knowest that thy boon is of no avail lest my husband thou dost give me. A Hindū wife may not wed twice. Satyavān alone may be father of the brave sons thou hast promised me."

Then Death smiled.

Sāvitrī had won—even over him, the mighty one. Her love had proved 'stronger than Death'. He untied the fatal noose, and loosed it from about Satyavān's sleeping soul, which he placed in the waiting arms of Sāvitrī.

"Hasten back," said Death, "hasten to where Satyavān's body lies still warm. Like to thee has woman never been; like to thee may the world be blessed with many wives."

Sāvitrī fled back swiftly, as love flies, and came again to where the warm body of Satyavān lay upon the grass. His soul returned into his body—and Satyavān was conscious again, and rose, restored.

With close clasped hands Satyavān and Sāviṭrī went back to the hermitage, where all rejoiced in their return, for their long absence had caused anxiety.

Satyavān's father found again his realm, his throne . . . King Ashvapaṭi's sons were long renowned as warriors brave and true . . . The name of Sāviṭrī lives on, and into the ears of every Hindū bride even to-day is whispered the words that are to inspire all her wedded life:

"MAYST THOU BE AS SĀVIṬRĪ."

THE FAMOUS BUDDHIST NUN

In the great Buddhist chronicle, the *Mahāvanso*, is found the story of Saṅghamitta, the most famous of Buddhist nuns.

When Prince Asoka—Dhammāsoko [1]—ruled the Avanti country, appointed thereto by his father, he journeyed to Ujjeni (Ujjain). On the way he stayed at Chetiya (near the modern Sāñchi) where he fell in love with the beautiful Devi, daughter of a Setthi (banker, chetty). She gave birth to the twin princes Ujjenio and Mahindo, and two years later to a daughter, Saṅghamitta.

In those days King Asoka was not yet a Buddhist. His conversion to Buddhism was in consequence of a miracle—though he had always been an exceedingly generous benefactor of the faith, and supported many thousands of Buddhist priests. Asoka asked of them :

"What is the doctrine propounded by the Divine Teacher ?"

[1] Asoka because he murdered his brothers (as was the custom) when he ascended the throne, and Dhamma because of his later piety.

"Eighty and four thousand are the discourses on the tenets of that doctrine," answered the great Tisso, son of Moggali.

"I will dedicate a vihāra [1] to each," exclaimed the King.

He set up eighty-four thousand temples throughout India,[2] and spent enormous sums for various purposes in order to show his "regard for the religion". He learned that the "supernaturally gifted Mahākālo,[3] the Nāga[4]-King, whose age extended to a Kappo,[5] had seen the four Buddhas (of this Kappo)". Asoka had him brought, "placed him under the white canopy of dominion, seated on the royal throne. Making to him many flower-offerings, and surrounded by the sixteen thousand women of the palace, he thus addressed him:

"Beloved, exhibit to me the person of the omniscient being of the infinite wisdom, the chakka-watti [6] of the doctrine of Mahā-risis." [7]

The Nāga King caused to appear a most enchanting image of Buddha, gifted with the thirty attributes of personal beauty, and resplendent with the eighty

[1] Monastery.

[2] Called Jambūdvīpa then.

[3] Great time.

[4] Serpent.

[5] World-period.

[6] Chakka=the wheel or circle of the universe, and watti=ruler or sustainer.

[7] Great sages.

charms of corporeal perfection, surrounded by the halo of glory, and surmounted by the lambent flame of sanctity.

Gazing on this (apparition), overjoyed and astonished, he (the King) made offerings thereto, and exclaimed :

" Such is the image created by this personage : what must not the image have been of the deity himself of happy advent ! "

Great was the joy of the illustrious and powerful monarch, Asoka, who then caused a great festival to be solemnised for seven successive days, known as the festival of ' sight offering ' (the miraculous figure of Buḍḍha being visible during that period).

Thus it befell as was foreseen by the priests of old who had held the second convocation on religion.

Tisso, the sub-King, in consequence of a miracle, became a priest and with him were ordained one hundred thousand others. Also Aggibrāhma, the husband of Saṅghamiṭṭa, the Sovereign's daughter, Saṅghamiṭṭa, and their son Sumāno were all ordained on the same day.

This took place in the fourth year of Asoka's reign—" for the spiritual happiness of the people ".

It so happened that all the eighty-four thousand vihāras were completed at the same time and also the great vihāra called Asokarāma . . . Asoka decided to have a great festival of offerings at all the temples

at the same moment throughout the Empire, also a great procession and readings of the doctrines of the faith . . . In fulfilling his order his subjects tried each one to surpass the other.

On that day, the King, decorated with all the insignia of royalty, and surrounded by his ministers mounted on elephants and horses, with all the pomp and power of state, proceeded, as if cleaving the earth, to the temple built by himself. Bowing down to the chief priest, he took up his station in the midst of the priesthood.

In that congregation there were eighty kotis[1] of priests. Among them were one hundred thousand ministers of religion who had overcome the dominion of sin. There were also ninety lakhs of priestesses, of whom a thousand priestesses had overcome the dominion of sin. These sanctified persons, for the purpose of gratifying King Dhammāsoko, performed a miracle for the manifestation to the world of the truth of their religion . . . (By the power of the miracle) he saw all the vihāras situated in every direction throughout the ocean-bound Jambudvīpa, resplendent with these offerings . . . Exceedingly overjoyed he enquired of the priesthood :

" Lords ! in the religion of the deity of felicitous advent, whose act of pious bounty has been the greatest ? "

[1] Koti=10,000,000, or innumerable.

The thêro,[1] son of Moggali, answered the Sovereign's enquiry :

" Even in the lifetime of the deity of happy advent a donor of offerings equal to thee did not exist."

. . . The King, greatly pleased, again thus enquired of him :

" Can a person circumstanced as I am, become a relation of the religion of Buḍḍha ? "

The thêro perceiving the perfection in piety of Mahiṇḍo the son, and of Saṅghamiṭṭa, the daughter of the King, and foreseeing that it would be a circumstance tending to the advancement of the faith, this supporter of the cause of religion thereupon addressed the monarch :

" Ruler of men ! a greater donor and benefactor to the faith even than thou art can be called only a benefactor ; but he who causes a son or daughter to be ordained a minister of our religion, that person will become not a ' benefactor ' but a ' relation ' of the faith ! "

Thereupon the sovereign, desirous of becoming a ' relation of the faith,' thus enquired of Mahiṇḍo and Saṅghamiṭṭa, who were present :

" My children, it is declared that admission into the priesthood is an act of great merit. What do ye decide ? will ye be ordained ? "

[1] A senior Buḍḍhist priest.

Hearing this appeal they thus addressed their father :

" Lord, if thou desirest it, this very day will we be ordained. The act of ordination is one profitable equally to us and to thee."

Even from the period of the ordination of the sub-King, and of Aggibrāhma, they had been desirous of entering the priesthood. The King, who had resolved to confer the office of sub-King on Mahiṇḍo, attached still more importance to his admission into the priesthood. He, with the utmost pomp, celebrated the ordination of his beloved son Mahiṇḍo, distinguished by his wisdom and his personal beauty, and of his daughter Saṅghamiṭṭa. At that period this Mahiṇḍo was twenty, and the royal daughter Saṅghamiṭṭa was eighteen years old.

Both were ordained on the same day, and the priestess Ḍhammapaṭi became the uppajjhayo[1] and the priestess Ayupali the instructress of Saṅghamiṭṭa. In due course she overcame the dominion of sin (by the attainment of arhaṭship)[2] . . . This was in the sixth year of the reign of Ḍhammāsoka, the benefactor of Laṅka[3] . . . As the sun and moon at all times

[1] One who assists the lover of good works—a preceptor or sponsor who confers the upasampaḍa ordination (*i.e.*, the perfect attainment).

[2] From ari=foes (*i.e.*, sinful passions), and hatta attā= being destroyed or overcome.

[3] Ceylon.

illumine the firmament, so the priestess Saṅghamiṭṭa and Mahiṇḍo shone forth the light of the religion of Buḍḍha.

After Mahiṇḍa had been a théro of twelve years standing, he thought it was time for the conversion of Laṅka. He meditated upon the mission and saw that the propitious time would be when the present King of Laṅka should have passed and his famous son, Ḍevananpiyaṭisso, would be upon the throne. Six months passed and again Mahiṇḍo meditated upon the mission.

He saw that the period had arrived for undertaking the mission enjoined by his father . . . " May the said Ḍevananpiyaṭisso . . . after having ascertained from my father's ambassador the merits of the three blessed treasures . . . acquire a right understanding of them (the doctrines of Buḍḍha). May he on the full-moon day of the month of Jettho [1] visit the Missa Mountain,[2] for on that very day I shall myself repair to renowned Laṅka."

Maginḍo,[3] appearing to the illustrious théro Mahindo, thus addressed him :

" Depart on thy mission for the conversion of Laṅka. It is the fulfilment of the prediction of the supreme Buḍḍha (pronounced at the foot

[1] May—June.

[2] Mihintalle.

[3] Sakko, ḍeva of ḍevas, *i.e.*, God of Gods, or Inḍra.

of the bo-tree). We also will there render our assistance."

On the full-moon day of Jettho, Mahiṇḍo and a special band rose aloft into the air and instantly alighting in Laṅka at the superb Missa Mountain, stationed himself on the rocky peak of the delightful and celebrated Ambatthalo.

King Ḍevananpiyaṭisso went out on an elk hunt, and in order to lead him to Mahiṇḍo the ḍeva took on the form of an elk, to which the King gave chase. The elk fled until it reached the spot where the priests were, then it vanished. Mahiṇḍo, thinking the King might be frightened of so many, caused all except himself to disappear.

"Come hither, Tisso," he said.

But the King feared that such familiarity indicated he was a Yokkho.[1] But Mahiṇḍo soon relieved his fears, and the King learning that he was from Ḍhammāsoko, as had been advised, approached reverently. After Mahiṇḍo had satisfied himself that the King could comprehend the doctrine he propounded certain parts of it to him. At the conclusion the King with his forty thousand followers obtained the salvation of that faith . . .

The ladies of the palace heard from the King of the piety of the thḗro Mahiṇḍo and desired to be presented to him. As a place of meeting the King

[1] Demon.

caused to be erected a splendid hall within the precincts of the palace, canopied with white cloths, and decorated with flowers. Mahiṇḍo and his followers appeared miraculously and were seated and served with food. When that was finished the sovereign, "seating himself near them, sent for Anula, the consort of his younger brother . . ."

Princess Anula proceeding thither, together with five hundred women, and having bowed down and made offerings to the théros, placed herself (respectfully) by the side of them.

The théro preached to them three of the great discourses. They attained the first stage of sanctification.

The next morning the princess Anula, who had come attended by five hundred females for the purpose of doing reverence to the théro, attained the second stage of sanctification. She thus addressed the monarch :

"Liege, permit us to enter the order of priesthood."

The sovereign said to the théro :

"Vouchsafe to ordain these females."

The théro replied to the monarch :

"Mahārāja, it is not allowable to us to ordain females. In the city of Pāṭaliputṭa there is a priestess. She is my younger sister, renowned under the name of Saṅghamiṭṭa, and profoundly learned. Despatch, ruler, (a letter) to our royal father, begging that he

may send her, bringing also the right branch of the bo-tree of the Lord of Saints itself, the monarch, of the forests ; as also eminent priestesses. When that theri (Saṅghamitta) arrives she will ordain these females.

. . . Devanampiyatisso meditated in his own palace on the proposition of the théro, of bringing over the great bo-tree as well as the théri Saṅghamitta ; and on a certain day, within the term of that 'wasso,'[1] seated by the théro, and having consulted his ministers, he himself sent for and advised with his maternal nephew, the minister Aritṭho . . . The King addressed him thus :

"My child, art thou willing, repairing to the court of Dhammāsoka, to escort thither the great bo-tree and the théri Saṅghamitta."

"Gracious lord, I am willing to bring these from thence thither ; provided, on my return to this land, I am permitted to enter into the priesthood."

The monarch replied : "Be it so !"

Aritṭho, conforming to the injunction both of the théro and of the sovereign, respectfully took his leave. The individual so delegated, departing on the second day of the increasing moon of the month 'Assayujo,'[2] embarked at Jambokolapaṭṭana.

[1] The four months of the rainy season, from the full-moon of July to the full-moon of November ; during that period Buddhist priests abstain from pilgrimage, and devote themselves to stationary religious exercises.

[2] September—October.

Having departed, under the (divine) injunction of the théro, traversing the ocean, he reached the delightful city of Puppa [1] on the very day of his departure.

The princess Anula, together with five hundred virgins, and also with five hundred of the women of the palace, having conformed to the pious observance of the 'dasasil' [2] order, clad in yellow garments, and strenuously endeavouring to attain the superior grades of sanctification, looked forward to the arrival of the theri, to enter the priesthood; leading a devotional life of piety in a delightful sacerdotal residence provided by the King in a certain quarter of the city, which had previously been the house of the minister Dōnō. The residence occupied by such pious devotees, 'upāsakas,' has become . . . celebrated in Laṅka by the name of 'upāsaka'.

Ariṭṭho announced his message to Asoka, and added: "Sovereign of the elephants: the consort of the brother of thy ally the King (of Laṅka), impelled by the desire of devoting herself to the ministry of Buḍḍha is unremittingly leading the life of a pious devotee; for the purpose of ordaining her a priestess depute thither the théri Saṅghamiṭṭa, sending also with her the right branch of the great bo-tree." He next explained to the théri herself the intent of the message of her brother Mahinḍo. The théri, obtaining

[1] Modern Patna.

[2] The ten commandments or precepts.

an audience of her father, communicated to him the message of the thêro.

The monarch, addressing her at once reverentially and affectionately, replied :

" My mother ! bereaved of thee, and separated from my children and grandchildren, what consolation will there be left wherewith to alleviate my affliction ? "

She rejoined : " Mahārāja ! the injunction of my brother Mahiṇḍo is imperative ; and those who are to be ordained are many ; on that account it is meet that I should repair thither."

Ḍhammāsoka wondered how he should obtain a branch of the bo-tree, as it was not meet to cut it. However, with the permission of the priesthood, he determined to send the branch and had an immense golden vase made to contain it. All the road to the bo-tree was swept and decorated, and the tree itself decked with innumerable jewels and banners, and laden with offerings of flowers . . . A vast concourse of people surrounded the tree, and in the inner circle were one thousand priests, with Tisso at their head, and one thousand Kings with Ḍhammāsoka at their head. The bo-tree was screened with a great curtain, behind which, alone, and with uplifted clasped hands, the King gazed upon it.

While thus gazing upon it, a portion thereof, being four cubits of the branch, remained visible, and the other branches vanished. Overjoyed,

the monarch invested the great bo-tree with the empire. Making offerings . . . he walked round it. Having bowed down, with uplifted hands, at eight places, and having placed that precious vase on a golden chair, studded with various gems, and of such height that the branch could be easily reached, he ascended it himself for the purpose of obtaining the supreme branch. Using vermilion in a golden pencil, and therewith making a streak on the branch, he pronounced this confession of his faith :

" If this supreme right bo-branch detached from this bo-tree is destined to depart from hence to the land of Laṅka, let it, self-severed, instantly transplant itself into the vase : then indeed I shall have implicit faith in the religion of Buddha."

The bo-branch, severing itself at the place where the streak was made, hovered over the mouth of the vase, which was filled with scented soil.

The bo-tree at once took root, and heaven and earth were filled with joy . . . From the fruit and leaves brilliant rays of the six primitive colours issuing forth illuminated the whole chakkawālan.[1] Then the great bo-branch together with its vase springing up into the air . . . remained invisible for seven days in the snowy regions of the skies.

For seventeen days the bo-branch was guarded by the highest in the land . . . Then, when the hour

[1] Circles or boundaries of the Universe.

for embarking it came, these personages bore it to the sea, and it was carefully deposited in the vessel under the care of the chief thêri, Saṅghamiṭṭa, with her priestesses and the illustrious Ariṭṭho. Dhammāsoko lamented much over the departure of the bo-branch.

The vessel in which the bo-tree was embarked dashed briskly through the water; and in the great ocean within the circumference of a yojana[1] the waves were stilled, flowers of the five different colours blossomed around it, and various melodies of music rang in the air. Innumerable offerings were kept up by innumerable ḍevas; but the nāgas had recourse to their magical arts to obtain possession of the bo-tree. The chief priestess Saṅghamiṭṭa, who had attained the sanctification of 'abhinna,'[2] assuming the form of the 'supanna,'[3] terrified those nāgas from their purpose. The subdued nāgas, respectfully imploring the chief priestess, with her consent conveyed the bo-tree to the settlement of the nāgas: for seven days innumerable offerings having been made by the Nāga King, they themselves bringing it back replaced it in the vessel.

Finally, Saṅghamiṭṭa arrived safely with the bo-tree in Laṅka, where great preparations had been made

[1] About sixteen miles.

[2] Abhi=supreme, and na=knowledge.

[3] The eagle, Garuḍa, the hereditary enemy of the serpent.

to receive it and her. The road had been cleared all the way to Anurādhapura . . . With much ceremony and many offerings Anurādhapura was reached on the fourteenth day. There the tree planted itself amid many miracles in just the manner that had been foretold by the Buddha—Saṅghamitta and all her retinue being present.

Thus was the first part of Saṅghamitta's mission fulfilled.

She now turned to the second part.

The aforesaid Anula, with her retinue of five hundred virgins and five hundred women of the palace, entering into the order of priesthood, in the community of the theri Saṅghamitta together with her community of priestesses, sojourned in the quarters of the priestesses, which obtained the name of 'upāsaka vihāra'. . . There at the residence of Anula, before she entered into the priesthood, the King formed twelve apartments . . . Even during the various subsequent schisms, these Hatthālakan priestesses uninterruptedly maintained their position at this establishment of twelve apartments—the story of which is as follows :

The state elephant of the King, roaming at his will, placed himself at a cool stream in a certain quarter of the city in a grove of Kadamba trees, and remained browsing there . . . Ascertaining the preference given by the elephant to the spot, they gave

it this name of 'Hatthālakan'. On a certain day this elephant refused his food; the King enquired the cause thereof of the théro . . . He thus spoke:

"The elephant is desirous that a thupo [1] should be built in the Kaḍamba grove."

The sovereign, who always gratified the desires of his subjects, without loss of time built there a thupo, enshrining a relic therein, and built an edifice over the thupo.

Saṅghamitta, being desirous of leading a life of devotional seclusion, and the situation of her sacerdotal residence not being sufficiently retired for the advancement of the cause of religion and for the spiritual comfort of the priestesses, was seeking another nunnery. Actuated by these pious motives, repairing to the aforesaid delightful and charmingly secluded thupo edifice, this personage, sanctified in mind and exalted by her doctrinal knowledge, enjoyed there the rest of noonday.

The King repaired to the temple of the priestess to pay his respects to the théri, and learning whither she had gone, he also proceeded thither and reverently bowed down to her. The Mahārāja Ḍevananpiyatisso, who could distinctly divine the thoughts of others, having graciously consulted her, inquired the object of her coming there, and having fully ascertained her wishes, erected round the thupo a charming residence

[1] Shrine for relics.

for the priestesses. This nunnery being constructed near the Hatthālakan Hall, hence became known as the 'Hatthālakan vihāra'. The chief thćri, Saṅghamiṭṭa —surnamed Sumiṭṭa, from her being the benefactress of the world—endowed with divine wisdom, sojourned there in that delightful residence of priestesses.

Ḍevananpiyaṭisso died and his younger brother took the throne as King Uṭṭiyó. Mahinḍo also died and to his body was given a magnificent procession to the funeral pile.

The chief thćri Saṅghamiṭṭa, who had attained the perfection of doctrinal knowledge, and was gifted with infinite wisdom, having fulfilled every object of her sacred mission, and performed manifold acts for the spiritual welfare of the land, while sojourning in the Hatthālakan establishment, in the sixty-ninth year of her ordination, and in the ninth year of the reign of King Uṭṭiyó, achieved 'parinibannan'.[1]

For her . . . the monarch caused offerings and funeral obsequies to be kept up with the utmost pomp for seven days . . . The whole of Laṅka was decorated in veneration of this event.

At the termination of the seventh day, removing the corpse of the thćri, which had been previously deposited in the funeral-hall out of the city, to the westward of the Thuparāmo dāgoba,[2] in the vicinity

[1] Supreme enlightenment.

[2] Relic shrine.

of the bo-tree near the Chetiyo hall, on the spot designated by the théri herself, the King performed the funeral obsequies of consuming the body with fire . . .

This monarch Uṭṭiyó erected a thupo there also—in honour of this pious, learned, and most famous of all Buddhist nuns.

MĪRĀBĀI, THE DEVOTEE

Among the noblest of India's devotees, among the sweetest of her religious poets, is Mīrābāi, the Rājputnī, Queen and saint.

The little old mountain village of Neraṭā in Mārwār was Mīrābāi's birthplace, 1517. Her father was Raṭan Singh of the line of the Rahṭor rulers of Mārwār. The little one was so sweet, so lovely, and already saintly—a wee devotee to whose childish imagination her toys and dolls of painted clay were forms of Shrī Kṛshṇa, the Lord of Love, whom she served with a rich joy marvellous in so tiny a child.

As she grew into girlhood, so grew also her devotion. Her heart seemed ever to be outpouring a 'Song of Love'; to her the whole world was one great pæan of adoration poured out to the 'Fountain of Love'. Her lips framed hymns of praise of rare beauty and richness of composition—a gift that was later to be her greatest power in drawing men to the feet of God.

Girlhood passed: the simple sheltered life of the Indian girl, whose days flow smoothly, uneventfully,

void of stress or strain, till, suddenly, she finds herself confronting her marriage day. So was it with Mīrābāi; but the announcement of her coming marriage brought to her no thrill of wonder and surprise, but only consternation. She had other dreams, other longings.

Shyly she sought her mother, and with reverent folded hands entreated:

"Māṭajī, hear me, I pray thee. Men are made to worship, to serve God. Though immersed in the world yet it is not for us to forget Him. Those who marry must give all their thought to the maintenance of the home-life; and, Māṭajī, I would serve God, and only God—I beg thee not to marry me."

Her mother was much astonished to hear such words. She had not laid great store by Mīrābāi's religious tendencies, 'twas good for a child to be pious. So she hastily chid her daughter for her strange words.

"Child," she said, severely, "thou knowest not what thou sayest. What dost thou know of marriage! 'Tis for thy parents to do for thee as they deem best; for thee but to obey."

Mīra went away slowly, downcast. So knew well that it was useless to plead further against the old custom. By this time negotiations would have been carried to such a point that for the sake of honour her parents would not withdraw—even had they been

willing, which she could see they were not. But there was a big resolve in her girl's heart—one that she kept, for great was her devotion, great her purpose and strong her will. She determined that wed or unwed, Queen or not, she should follow but one duty, imperative, impelling—the adoration of God.

"I vow to serve Thee," she murmured, "ever and for ever, to serve Thee, my Lord, utterly, in humble service, love and worship."

Soon afterwards she was married to Kumār Bhojrāj, son of Sāṅgā, Rānā of Mewār. Sāṅgā was sixth in succession from Hamīr Singh, he who braved the terrors of the gloomy cavern to win again the ancient sword borne thither by Paḍmini on that awful day when Chiṭṭoor fell. But Chiṭṭoor had been rewon, and now Sāṅgā ruled all the hereditary dominions of Mewār, held east Mālwa in dependence and was acknowledged Rājpuṭ leader by the lords of Mārwār, Jaipur, and many others.

So Mīrābāi, fairest of Rājpuṭrīs, became the highest lady in the land. And at first she was happy. Both she and her husband loved poetry and composed poems with extraordinary facility, and they delighted in each other's talent. But there was a difference in their verses which grew more and more marked as time went on. Mīrābāi's had but one theme—the love of God, sure salvation for all men; Bhojrāj

sang of fame and of glory, of eminence and dominion, and of the pleasures of life.

At first Bhojrāj allowed Mīrābāi fullest liberty. Gradually she withdrew from the gaities of the court, left aside her silks and jewels and wore only the severe ascetic robes. She refused all luxury and slept upon a deer skin on the floor. She gathered her maids and taught them to sing her exquisite compositions, and her own matchless voice led them in song.

Soon palace walls were all too narrow—Mīrābāi would sing to the world. Where men and women congregated, there must she tell of God's love for all. At last she went to the temple where there was an image of Shrī Kṛshṇa, the messenger of Divine Love to the world, whose flute had charmed it, and led it docile to the Beloved Feet.

In the temple Mīrābāi sang herself into ecstasy and in her ecstasy danced till she fell in trance . . . When she recovered she was changed. Into her seemed to have passed the very heart of Love itself . . . She frequented the temple. The people flocked to hear her wonderful song, from the uttermost parts of India they came and crowded about the temple, listening fervently to Mīrābāi's marvellous voice, till, exalted beyond their wont, they vowed themselves fervently to higher, better things.

The fame of Mīrābāi reached the 'Great Moghul's' ears.[1] He, who bowed to greatness wherever he met it, longed to hear the songs over which all India was waxing enthusiastic. But he knew that it would be considered as deadliest insult if he came openly and asked to hear and see the Mahārāṇī. No that could not be—it would embroil him with the rash and fiery Rājputs. For smaller causes than that they had flown to arms, the women to death. What to do? He consulted with Ṭān Sen, the clever court-musician.

"The ascetic's robe," whispered Ṭān Sen, "will give you easy entrance where you will, and none will know you in such a guise."

Thus they went; they listened at the doors of the temple where Mīrābāi sang. Akbar was ravished, overcome. He fell at the feet of the Queen and begged her to point him to the way of salvation. In sweet wise words the Queen urged a pure life lived in the name and love of God.

Akbar laid at her feet a magnificent necklace, diamond set.

Mīrābāi was surprised that an ascetic should have such a jewel.

"Hast thou come by it righteously?" she asked, "else I may not offer it!"

[1] This incident is so woven into the story of Mīrābāi that we give it, though, chronologically, its truth is more than doubtful, for it is said by the best authorities that Mīrābāi died when Akbar was only four years old.

"Deviji, Jamna's dark waters gave up this treasure as I bathed. 'Tis a pure offering for thy God."

So Mīrābāi hung it round the neck of the image of Shrī Kṛshṇa.

For long the Rānā had viewed with growing disfavour the behaviour of his wife. It was incredible that the Mahārāṇi of Mewār should act thus. And now came to his ears the story of the necklace. He sent for it, and examined it. Ten lakhs of rupees at least was its value. Who so wealthy as to offer such a jewel? One, a court jeweller, declared he had seen it sold to Akbar, the 'Great Moghul'. Enquiries were made: it was true! The Mahārāṇi had been seen, touched by a Musulmān—unutterable disgrace! The name of Mewār had been dragged in the mud—Mīrābāi was not fit to live.

But not one could be found who for any bribe whatever would raise his hand against the Queen. More sacred even than the royal command was the person of the devotee.

She was banished to small and poor apartments, without attendants—but despite it all she was happy. The fact of her living irritated the King, he sent her poison. She drank it—in the name of God—and nothing happened. A golden casket was brought her, within it 'a necklace for the devotee'. She opened the box. An angry snake sprang out and struck her again and yet again. Unafraid, Mīrābāi calmly put

the deadly creature about her neck—'a mālā[1] of chandra[2]-beads'—she called it . . . Then a curt message came asking Mīrābāi to destroy herself, it was the King's decree—nor would he grant her any interview.

"I obey," said Mīrābāi simply.

It was the hour of her release.

Fearing to give sorrow to those who loved her and who, despite all the King's orders and displeasure, kept as near as possible to their beloved Queen and spiritual teacher, Mīrābāi arose in the dark of night and departed alone.

She came to a river, and in order to carry out the cruel command, plunged into it. She thought to feel the cold waters envelop her and draw her into their silent depths, and she fastened her mind upon the Lord whom she served, trusting that when she should be drawn from her body that His love would enwrap her . . . She was conscious! A great light flashed: some wondrous radiant Being bent down to her and spoke:

"Thou hast obeyed thy husband and now art dead indeed to the world. But another world awaits you, the world of men's hearts, which long for the message that it is for you to give. Rise, go forth, and lift mankind nearer to the divine Lotus Feet."

[1] Garland.

[2] Seeds sacred to Shrī Kṛshṇa.

Mīrābāi awoke, to find that she lay upon a river bank, but seemingly far from where she had flung herself in. The darkness of the night had passed and the sun was shining. She remembered vividly all her vision. She rose, and went across the fields singing the praises of God.

Soon she met some cow-herd boys and she asked of them the way to Bṛnḍāvan.[1] The boys hastened to do her honour and offered her milk, going happily with her to show her the way . . . On she went through the villages, and the sweetness of her song was such that it seemed to the people as if the irresistible mystery of Heaven were in it. They drew near to her, attracted, and full of spiritual longing. Some left all to follow her . . . In time they reached Bṛnḍāvan, and there Mīrābāi decided to stay.[2]

In Bṛnḍāvan lived Rūp Gossain, well-known devotee and ascetic. He was profoundly learned, but he cherished two great prejudices.

"Do you want salvation?" he would ask. "Then see neither women nor gold!"

Mīrā soon heard of him; she sent him a message.

[1] Where the youth of Shrī Kṛshṇa was passed, and ever since has been sacred to him.

[2] One account says that she went as far as Ḍwārak, the old city of Shrī Kṛshṇa, and that the persecution of her husband followed her even there, but that she was miraculously protected.

"Mīrā knows that in Bṛndāvan there is but one man—Shrī Kṛshṇa. Many others live here, it is true, but as they all dwell in His love they are all but the maids of Gokula. If, therefore, by some mischance Rūp Gossain, being a man, has entered the abode of the maids of our Lord—he should fly, for if found out he will be chastised."

The holy man was pleased with the message. In return he sent asking her to visit him. Mīrābāi came, and reverently bent at the old man's feet.

"My daughter," said Rūp Gossain, "is there aught that I may do for thee."

"Oh, father," she answered, "permit that I dwell with thee in this temple, and from thy lips learn the wisdom of God."

And so it was. Some say that Rūp Gossain was master and Mīrābāi disciple, others, the reverse. Perhaps each had something that the other lacked.

Mīrābāi did not cease to sing, and her songs were caught up and handed on, and every village knew them, and they echoed too in stately palaces . . . The devotee was more powerful far than the Queen, for love conquers the world.

In Chittoor the people, high and low, sang Mīrābāi's songs, at the end of which was always the refrain—"Mīrā says it is thus."

The Rānā was at first angry, then ashamed, and at last was touched by the fact that his wife

ruled a realm far mightier than his, a realm fringing the eternal, for it was of the souls of men. His people went from Chiṭṭoor on pilgrimage to bend at the feet of the woman he had rejected—and not only that, they began to murmur against him for having cast her out. He thought long over what to do, and at last felt that he must go and ask her to return.

But would she? He would go as an ascetic and ask her. All the way to Bṛndāvan the proud Rānā walked, alone, in humblest dress. He came to the temple where Mīrābāi sat chanting the names of the Lord. He begged alms of her.

"I am a beggar woman and have naught to give—save blessings."

"Nay, I have come to thee for help!"

What can I do for thee?"

"Thou canst forgive!" and he tore away the disguise he wore.

Mīrābāi was delighted; in her heart was only love and that left no room for recrimination. She returned to Chiṭṭoor, living there half the year and the other half in Bṛndāvan. She had an immense influence over all who came to her, and yet her demands of them were extremely simple: To live as though in the constant presence of God, filled with love and devotion for Him. "For," she said, "salvation comes through love of God alone."

She passed her life comforting weary souls, pouring into hungry hearts the grace of a boundless love. The songs she sang still live in the hearts and on the lips of the people, and her name is held in reverence throughout the land.

PAḌMINĪ THE BEAUTIFUL

ALĀ-U-ḌĪN ruled in Delhi, the imperial throne his by the treacherous murder of his old uncle, Jelāl-u-ḍīn. Alā-u-ḍīn was of the Khiljis, a Tartar tribe from the far Jaxartes.

"Authors of every kind of mischief and devastation" —said the famous Baber of them, because each one of them waded through blood to the mighty seat of the 'Great Moghul'.

Alā-u-ḍīn loved beauty madly, insanely. See the lovely Alai Darwāsa that rose at his command; but to build it he tore from a Rājā great piles of diamonds, pearls, emeralds, rubies and other precious stones—and left him and his people bankrupt and starving.

'The second Alexander,' Alā-u-ḍīn arrogantly called himself. He would undertake a universal conquest! He dreamed too of a prophet's honours; he would be the founder of a new religion, he, the illiterate parricide, whose later cynic maxim was:

"Religion has no connection with civil government, but is only the business, or rather amusement, of private life."

To advice and counsel he retorted haughtily:

"The will of a wise prince is better than the opinions of variable bodies of men."

Twenty-one years later Alā-u-ḍīn's unholy life closed. Kāfir, his eunuch slave, poisoned his mind against everyone till he had full sway over his master, then with poison he hastened the soured, suspicious Emperor to his grave. One good thing marked his reign—his conquests were well governed despite his caprice and absurd demands.

Such was the man, typical of all his kind, who revelled in luxury and sensuality; whose beauty-greed brought bitter sorrow in its train—as many a high-born Hindū knew.

About 1303 Alā-u-ḍīn hovered around the Rājpuṭ states, seeking to add to his conquests, when he heard of the matchless beauty of Paḍmini, wife of Bhim Singh, regent of Mewār. Supremely fair was Paḍmini, fairer than any other woman on earth—so ran the rumour.

Alā-u-ḍīn's insensate lust was at once aroused. He sent spies into Chiṭṭoor, bad women, who wormed their way to Paḍmini and whispered evil in her ears. Offended and amazed Paḍmini turned them out; thus was Alā-u-ḍīn challenged, and Rājpuṭ honour aroused.

The chief glory of the Rājpuṭs was their honour; they fought to the death 'for honour's sake'. To

read aright the thrilling pages of Rājpuṭ history, it is well to remember that 'honour' moulded Rājpuṭ men and women in a mould so stern that they endured marvellous ordeals unflinchingly. Men went to the battle-field and women to the flaming pyre with but one cry—'for honour's sake'.

Young Lakumsi sat upon the throne of old Chiṭṭoor—the chosen home of the goddess Amba Bhavāni. High up on the rocks soared the proud city of 'tragic fate,' capital of Mewār and veritable treasury of India's precious arts and crafts. In her stately palaces none but sun-descended lords might rule. Proudest of all proud kings was he of Mewār, heir of the great Rāmachaṇdra of old. He was 'regent of Mahāḍeva,' who alone might wear the strange necklace of braided hair and lotus seeds; 'Sun of the Hiṇḍūs,' who never yet has bent to alien rule, nor recognised defeat as final. King among men had he to be to rule the fiery Rājpuṭs, they who swore 'by the Throne,' 'by this weapon'—the keen dagger ever ready to hasty hands, and 'by this sword and shield,' and who poured out blood like water where honour led.

As Lakumsi was but a child, Bhimsi, his uncle, ruled in his name. Great in war was Bhimsi, in council sure, and utterly loyal to the throne he served; to him Paḍminī was tenderest wife and wisest counsellor.

Padmini came from Ceylon, that jewel isle of the eastern seas. Chittoor marvelled at her loveliness and her utter goodness. Her praises sounded upon the lips of all, and at last were poured into the eager ears of the Moghul tyrant, who grew mad with desire, and was jealous that another than himself should possess the most beautiful of women. He would go and take her by force; so with his vast army he marched on Chittoor and besieged it. For many weary months the troops chafed round the rocks of the impregnable and defiant city—for her hour had not yet struck!

There were bitter attacks by night and hot skirmishes by day, but the repulse was so certain, so deadly, that Alā-u-dīn grew despondent. He was wasting his time and his army for nothing . . . Why had he been foolish enough to swear that he would possess Padmini, or die? He wondered if she were really worth it all!. . . And the life and luxury of Delhi called. The severe camp-life amid the rocky desert bored him, even though he devised a thousand wanton ways to beguile the weary hours. After all, in the old capital there were many charming women ready and proud to be an Emperor's favourite!

Then came a surprise. Bhimsi offered gold, much gold, for peace . . . His straightened position left him no choice. Peace or death it should be, but not this horrid starvation of his people, sapping their

strength, their power to defend . . . Alā-u-ḍīn cursed such offers—Paḍmini he wanted, Paḍmini he would have!

So commenced again the weary struggle, the thinning ranks in Chiṭṭoor and her people bravely starving, but they fought just as fiercely and repulsed Alā-u-ḍīn so often that at last he was heartily sick of it all.

Then someone clever and crafty suggested he should win by deceit what he could not gain in open warfare. Up to Chiṭṭoor went a messenger.

"To Regent Bhimsi I offer peace; and my only condition is that I may look upon the face of Paḍmini—loveliest woman in the world."

A hot answer rose to Bhimsi's lips. Such an insult! He would race down the steep hillside and strike down the insolent Emperor. Strong arms restrained him and cooler heads counselled softer, saner measures. The messenger carried back the curt answer:

"To-morrow come alone and weaponless, and thou shalt have thy desire."

Such was the faith in Rājpuṭ word and Rājpuṭ honour, that Alā-u-ḍīn knew he would be perfectly safe amid the stern foes in Chiṭṭoor. But he himself cherished a treacherous plan.

One fair April day in the delicious spring weather of North India, Alā-u-ḍīn, robed in costliest array,

set out alone upon his strange adventure. His soldiers, marvelling, watched him pass through the camp, serene and haughty in his pride of place and power.

It amused the Emperor to find himself alone, on his way to gaze at beauty through a mirror! He felt though that his royal pride and power were mocked, he whose vast armies must in the end crush this little kingdom did he but persist. What if after all Padmini were not so lovely! Well, Mewār would know what an Emperor's hate and wounded pride could be! And if Padmini were utterly fair and desirable? He had a plan.

Up at the gates the sentries saluted him gravely, and the Regent met him courteously. Not a single face was other than impassive or curious.

Alā-u-dīn passed through the quiet city to the great Durbar Hall, so lavishly splendid. There he saw Padmini—but only in a mirror! Nor was it Padmini's direct reflection he saw, but only Padmini's reflection twelve times reflected. But Alā-u-dīn gazed into the mirror and knew that men had spoken truly—Padmini was glorious. By the Prophet she was beautiful! an houri out of Paradise. He would have her, cost what it would.

The Rājputs regard inwardly; only their given word and the promise of peace for Chittoor held them silent and impassive. How large a satisfaction it

would be to strike down this dark swarthy man, twirling his black moustaches and casting covetous glances upon the image of their loved and revered Queen.

Poor Paḍmini! she bore the ordeal with queenly grace and dignity. But her heart was sore. She consoled herself that it was for her people and so endured to the end. She felt as though she would ever afterwards feel the stain of that insulting gaze.

It was over! Alā-u-ḍīn longed to stay and feast his eyes upon such beauty. He turned to go and a great sigh of relief broke from the assembled Rājpuṭs . . . In the Zenāna Paḍmini wept, sore ashamed, and longed for Bhimsi's return that she might throw herself at his feet and beg forgiveness for the stain that was upon her.

Meanwhile Bhimsi accompanied Alā-u-ḍīn, who praised the courage of the Rājpuṭs, and even declared that henceforth Musalmān and Rājpuṭ should be sworn friends. On they walked down nearer and nearer to the Emperor's camp, and though Bhimsi grew uneasy yet he could not show distrust, for had not his foe trusted utterly in his own given word.

Then Alā-u-ḍīn openly praised Paḍmini: "Rāṇi Paḍmini is indeed lovelier than all other women. Thou art surely fortunate in possessing this pearl

among women. How may I thank thee for the pleasure thou hast given me, or praise enough the beauty of thy Queen!"

Bhimsi could have crushed the hateful words in the Emperor's throat, but honour held him silent, helpless . . . They had reached the foot of the hill and were almost in the Muslim camp. A sudden sly smile upon the Emperor's face, a swift signal, and ambushed men sprang upon Bhimsi and held him fast—a prisoner! Trapped and bound, Bhimsi merely looked his unutterable scorn and contempt at the Emperor, who writhed beneath his gaze.

"Bah!" he mocked uneasily, "thy pride shall be humbled. Didst think an Emperor might thus be baulked? Thou hast but whetted my appetite; my request was but a ruse to see if Padmini were really worthy of being my Queen. And such she shall be. I, Alā-u-ḍin, swear it, by my beard and by the holy Prophet. I shall possess Padmini—or destroy Chiṭṭoor."

Then he turned to the soldiers: "Guard well this man; if he escapes ye will be flayed alive!" Bhimsi was marched away and put under strong guard.

Up in Chiṭṭoor utter consternation reigned. The Regent captured, a prisoner! For a while all were bewildered, then a deputation hastened down to the Musalmān camp, and demanded what was to be the ransom for Bhimsi.

"Padmini, the fairest of women," was the curt answer. "Deliver her over at once or Bhimsi will be killed, and the fight shall recommence."

For one long anguished week Chittoor was in the grip of despair and indecision. Lakumsi was only a boy, and none of Bhimsi's sons were old enough to lead. Padmini bewailed the beauty that had brought such disaster upon them all . . . But she roused herself, for in Bhimsi's absence the Government was in her hands. Her uncle Gorah Singh took command of the army.

At last Padmini had a plan—a wild risky plan that none but a Rājput would have dared to carry out. She called together all her generals, nobles and leaders to the Durbar Hall and put before them her scheme. Instantly they were eager to carry it out.

A messenger of peace went down to the Emperor: "O great Emperor! Padmini will come, if thou wilt send the Regent safely to the city. Would the all-powerful King grant that the Rāni be accompanied by her large retinue of faithful maids who cannot bear to leave her?"

Alā-u-dīn was wild with delight over the success of his scheming.

"Let Padmini come as she will," he cried, "in any state that she thinks will befit the future Empress . . . Only, hurry, hurry back and bid her not delay!"

Then Gorah came to make arrangements for the reception of the Rāṇī.

"Might the Rāṇī have also a small number of armed men with her to protect her women," he craftily suggested to Alā-u-ḍīn.

"No, no," laughed the Emperor, "that we cannot have! We do not want any appearance of battle to mar such a joyous event. We give you our royal word that no one will molest the Rāṇī's attendants, nor disturb their privacy. I will issue a command, and none will dare to disobey."

Gorah hastened back. All was ready for Paḍmini to pass down to the royal camp, where every one was *en fête*, for Alā-u-ḍīn had given orders that this was to be a day of feasting and rejoicing and all arms were to be laid down. The soldiers obeyed readily.

The Emperor called his attendants and made them robe him in costliest apparel. Then he watched impatiently for the appearance of his promised bride.

In Chiṭṭoor preparations went on swiftly, but in sad silence. Paḍmini, closely veiled, entered the royal dooly and drew close its rich curtains. Alā-u-ḍīn snapped his fingers with glee when he saw her dooly swing through the big gates of the fort. It was followed by seven hundred others, each one borne on the shoulders of six stalwart bearers. They threaded their way down the steep hillside,

through the carousing camp towards the Emperor's tent, large and gorgeously decorated for the reception of Paḍminī.

The swaying doolies were set down ; Gorah went forward to ask for the release of Bhimsi.

"Nay, not so fast," said the Emperor gaily, "when I have married Paḍminī, thy Prince may go. But see, here is gold for thee, thou hast behaved well—be content!"

Gorah kept his temper, and let the insult pass.

"One favour the Rāṇī asks," he said quietly, but with flashing eyes. "She wishes to say farewell to the Rāṇā, to see him, O Sulṭān, for the last time—"

Ungraciously the Emperor gave his permission, and he stared after the dooly as it swung away to the tent where Bhimsi was kept prisoner. All the other doolies swung after it and were put down around the tent, and the curious Musalmān soldiers had to move back to make room for them.

Two fine horses stood ready near the door of the tent, with seeming Moslems in charge of them ; when she saw them Paḍminī uttered a sigh of great relief. She entered the tent.

At sight of her Bhimsi rose aghast.

"You here?" he grasped.

"Hush," warned Paḍminī in a quick whisper. "Quick, arm yourself. The horses are ready outside . . . Come, come at once!"

But somehow the Emperor had become suspicious; he cursed himself for having granted a last farewell—he burst into the tent. Baḍul, Gorah's nephew, and but a lad, sprang at him. He leapt back shouting wildly—"Treachery! treachery!" Before the amazed guards could move, Paḍmini and Bhimsi flashed out of the tent, sprang on the waiting horses, and fled before any one could grasp what had happened.

The guards rushed in and prevented any hurt to the Emperor. As though at a signal, from out every one of those seven hundred doolies sprang an armed Rājpuṭ, and every bearer proved to be a soldier in disguise . . . Then followed horrid confusion, the Rājpuṭs fighting fiercely and the Moslems dazed with the suddenness of it all. But they snatched up their weapons and fell savagely upon the band of Rājpuṭs. Gorah fell where the fight raged thickest, and the lad Bāḍul at once became the leader. The maddened Alā-u-ḍin goaded on his hordes to slay every one of the Rājpuṭs—who slowly pressed towards the foot of the hill. When at last they gained the fort they were but a wounded desperate handful of all the five thousand who had gone down with their Rāṇi . . . With unconscious irony this is called the 'half-sack' of Chiṭṭoor—because *some* returned.

Alā-u-ḍin was so angry and disgusted at the escape of Paḍmini that he raised the siege and marched away to Delhi. Not that his determination to possess

Paḍminī had lessened—Oh no !—he would come again and wreak full vengeance.

Bāḍul went to his uncle's wife and told her of Gorah's last hours. And, though she had heard it all, she begged again the story of Gorah's prowess ere he fell.

"And what did my lord ?" she asked the boy.

"Reaper of the harvest of battle was he," answered Bāḍul proudly. "Behind him I followed, the humble gleaner of his sword. A blood-red bed of honour of slain foes for himself he spread . . . With a barbarian prince for his pillow he fell asleep—and he sleeps well amidst his foes."

"But tell me again, my child," she urged.

"Ah, how shall I further tell thee of his deeds, since he left no foe alive to fear or fly his mighty arm !"

Then Gorah's wife smiled and said : "My lord will wonder at my delay"—and she went to the flames, exultant.

And Paḍminī and Bhimsi ? Again and again the great-hearted Regent strove to confort the sweet shame-stricken queen. For him she was ever purest of women, and that hated gaze mattered nothing. It was over now, the foe repulsed, perhaps never to return. Ah yes, he too bewailed the fearful loss of so many brave warriors, but was not honour more than all else ?

Then happy years passed; Chittoor saw other happenings, and Alā-u-ḍīn was forgotten—almost. Lakumsi had died, and Bhimsi was now Rāṇā of Mewār. The passing years had added to the unfading beauty of Paḍminī greater dignity, fuller sweetness. She rejoiced openly in her twelve brave sons. They were so strong, so brave, each one seemed a hero born.

But Alā-u-ḍīn had not forgotten. Suddenly his swarming hosts were settling thick and menacing around Chittoor. Give up Paḍminī? no! no! He would wreck the Empire if needs be, but the Rāṇī would be his, her supreme and ripened loveliness his to enjoy.

Bhimsi groaned; his ranks had been so sorely depleted in the former struggle, and Chittoor was unprepared to meet so vast an army. But every Rājput warrior pledged his word that not even one of their kith or kin should fall into the hated Muslim hands.

It was no passive siege this time, but sharp attacks upon the city by day and by night, ceaselessly. The strength and endurance of Chittoor was tested to the uttermost. At last the southern point of the city fell into the enemy's hands, and the Rājputs knew that the end drew near. All through that sore time Paḍminī was a source of strength and inspiration to all. She urged when others dissuaded; she cheered when depression

hung heavily ; she tended the pain and anguish of the wounded and dying, it was she who kept the city from despair by loving, tender counsel.

Nevertheless secret fears assailed Padmini too. That she would never be captured by the Emperor, she knew full well ; but what about her twelve brave sons ? What would be their fate when at last the city fell ? as fall it must ! Would old Mewār's royal line perish miserably ? And then she prayed to Devi Amba Bhavāni to grant once more the protection she seemed to have withdrawn. Ill-fated prayer ! Who was to dream of the answer the goddess would give !

The Rāṇā weary and worn flung himself down one evening upon a couch in the Durbar Hall. He gave rein to his despondency for he was alone. A turmoil of unhappy thoughts surged through his brain.

Chittoor was doomed, doomed ; nothing could save her. Perhaps he could save his precious sons, but even of that there seemed little hope—the enemy's circle was so wide all about them. Only a faint light lessened the gloom of the vast hall . . . midnight was striking. All was hushed save the faint far yelp of a dog, and the subdued sword-clanks of the faithful guardians of the door.

A sudden deep voice rang through the hall : " I am hungry ! "

The Rāṇā started up amazed. Again the strange unearthly voice wailed : " I am hungry ! "

Then before him in the pillared distance the astounded Rāṇā saw a towering majestic form—the form of Amba Bhavāni, goddess of Chittoor.

The surprise of the Rāṇā subsided, and reverently he asked, "Art thou not satisfied, O Devi? eight thousand of my kinsmen have been offered to thee."

"Nay, not satisfied," replied the deep echoing voice, "not satisfied. I want royal heroes. Twelve of the ruling house must die for Chittoor—else must I pass from thee and thine, and with me the power and prestige of Mewār."

Then the Goddess vanished. The Rāṇā sorrowed; he knew not how to satisfy the Devi. Morning came; Bhimsi sought out Padmini and told her of the night's august visitor. A sense of disaster settled upon Padmini, but she gave no sign of her dread.

"Call at once," she urged, "a council of thy chiefs. Put the matter before them." The Rāṇā did so. The stern warriors, remnant only of a once invincible band, heard in tense silence the story of the night. They smiled at their ruler's fears.

"Nay, nay, sire," they cried, "'twas but a dream, born of thy weariness and anxiety."

"Come with me this night and see for yourselves," the Rāṇā answered grimly.

That night he, his sons and his chiefs, sat silent and expectant in the big Hall. All was still . . . Midnight rang out . . . Ere the last note had died

away a dull red glow appeared at the far end of the Hall. Larger it grew and larger and at last in the heart of it the Devī appeared, awesome, in her hand a naked sword. Her voice boomed through the silence—

"I am hungry"—

"What wouldst thou, O Ḍevī?" asked the Rāṇā. "The battle-field runs red with the blood of thy foes, will not that suffice, O Mother?"

"Nay," wailed the goddess, and her voice of doom struck chill fear into the heart of the bravest there. "Strew the earth as thou wilt with slain barbarians, what are they to me!"

"What is then thy will, O Ḍeviji?"

"I must have twelve royal lives with me. Twelve places are empty at my board—fill them, for I am hungry. Thou hast twelve sons (the Rāṇā shivered) give them to me. Crown them one by one, let them reign for three days with supreme authority and on the fourth go out to battle and to death—do this and thy house shall endure." She disappeared, the lurid light vanished.

Out sprang eager Ursi, eldest born: "I shall reign first, as eldest son it is my right," he claimed proudly.

Then arose a clamour. Each son had a claim to press for the honour of being first. At last the Rāṇā silenced them.

"To the eldest son belongs the right to reign first," he said sadly. To Ursi he said: "My son of great strength, I give into thy young hands the rule over our loved land."

They left the hall, the chiefs downcast, the Rāṇā mourning the doom of his sons, and the lads themselves excited, scarce realizing the meaning of their fate.

After due ceremonies the golden gaḍḍi held the boyish form of Ursi and the people gave him sad obeisance. Over his head spread the great red and gold umbrella, insignia of royalty, now symbol of death. Then came Ajeysi's turn, but the Rāṇā could not see the blight fall upon this best beloved of all his sons. For him should be life and future lordship of Mewār. One by one the other lads passed up to the fatal throne, ruled for three days, then donned the saffron robe and went out to battle and to death.

Paḍmini's eyes grew drier with every son who passed beyond the gates, her heart rent in the anguish of those dreadful ruthless partings. But her marvellous beauty never waned, only she paled, and the pallor but added a new and more ethereal touch to her exquisite beauty . . . The ring of sunny boyish faces grew smaller and smaller, and she knew not how she would endure the agony to the end. But she showed no fear, no sorrow, she cheered each loved son to his first—and last—battle . . . Only Ajeysi and the Rāṇā were left.

"'Tis my turn now," said the Rānā. "I give thee, Ajeysi, to the State. Gird thee on thy weapons, take a handful of the bravest and fly, fly to Kailwarra, there grow in peace, and afterwards come again and rule in Chittoor. May the Goddess fulfil in thee her promise to the line of Mewār!" The Rāṇā's deep voice broke, he passed his hand tenderly over the loved young head. "Thou wilt go safely, my son; I will join thy brothers—they await me . . . Chittoor to thee my life I give, and, O Devi-Māta, be thou appeased . . . I and my sons will feast with thee . . . Give peace to the house of Mewār!"

"Father," implored the boy, "grant that I go in thy place; reign thou upon the throne, and I will die for thee!" In the lad's heart struggled love for his father and shame that he of all his brothers had not shared the honour of the battle-field.

"Nay, child," rebuked his father gently, "have I not spoken, 'tis for thee to obey. Thou must remain, we are doomed. And after thee, I charge thee, put Hamir, son of thy eldest brother, upon the throne."

The last dreadful day dawned. Bhimsi and Ajeysi stood for the last time together. They watched a strange and impelling sight of mothers, wives, sisters, daughters—nearest and dearest to them and their wild-eyed warriors, saffron robed. Day was

just breaking—the first flush of dawn was turning the city's twilight pallor to glowing pink. It flooded with rosy tenderness the severe white robes of those in the long procession coming into view. The music that heralded it—why, it told of a bride on her joyous way to her husband's home! . . . Steadily the women and girls and little ones passed. Here and there a sudden uncontrollable sob among the watchers told of a heart nigh breaking—of an agony almost unendurable . . . On and on they went towards the immense vault that stretched dark and gloomy beneath the palace, and built in anticipation of just such appalling *Johur* rites. Down there in the gloom mighty pyres were ready. Death, grim bridegroom, awaited there his many brides . . . The wide dark mouth of the cavern stood gaping—the ponderous doors rolled open . . . Slowly, slowly the procession advanced, singing as it came . . . The dread darkness swallowed them one by one.

Last of all came Padmini, surrounded by some of her noblest women. In her hands she carried the great sword, given of old to the founder of Mewār—a boon from the sacred hands of the Devi-Māta herself. At the great gates Padmini turned, and smiled a last farewell to her lord, a last smile of love that irradiated her pale face—promise of the reunion that should come even ere evening fell. Then

she too passed, singing, from their sight . . . The heavy doors clanged to . . . A great silence fell . . . Ears strained to catch one last echo of the voices of the fated singers. Then those warriors went swiftly to exact vengeance from the foe.

First Ajeysi was hurried away, and then they marched out full of a deadly desire to slay—and how they fought! Fearful havoc followed every Rājpuṭ sword as it cut, irresistible, through the Moslem ranks . . . But one by one they fell, till not a single saffron-robe was to be seen. And each man as he died tried to catch one last glimpse of the city where his loved ones were dying too.

It was over. Chiṭṭoor was his; but that great drifting cloud of smoke puzzled Alā-u-ḍin. Had they set fire to the city? He hoped not. It gave him an odd sense of foreboding . . . Ah! the prize was his at last; Paḍminī would be his loveliest queen. Up to the city he went, through the deserted streets to the palace. No one challenged his way, no sword sprang out to bar his entrance to the Rāṇī's apartments—no one, no one! He went in uneasily, but no movement could he hear, nor glimpse a single vanishing form . . . Silent and empty every room—outside silence and the shadows of the drifting smoke . . . Ah! the smoke! Bismillah! he understood it now, and he quailed before the awful majesty of such a deed.

He fled. Out of the palace he hurried and along the empty streets—afraid of the silence, afraid of the living spirit of sacrifice that held the place . . . A thin blast of hot air crept from out the cavern doors and swirled after him ; a sudden gust of wind brought the acrid smoke choking him . . . He sped, horrified, from the dead sacked city, victim to his horrid lusts and insatiable desires.

It is said that a huge serpent, venemous of breath, guards the ashes of Padmini and her women, and none may enter and disturb that dread silence. Only Hamir faced its terrors and won from uncanny hands the ancient sword that Padmini had carried with her.

A WOMAN WARRIOR

RĀI SURṬĀN was of the famous Solanki tribe. Right back to the great Balhāra Kings of Anhulwara he traced his lineage. Rāshṭrakulas were they, and ancient inhabitants of the country; later, they were Rahṭors of the Deccan—older than those other Rahṭors of the colder north. The Rāshṭrakulas were Rājpuṭs of a southern group, and were of Scythian (foreign) descent, immigrations of the Āryans from the secret heart of Central Asia. The Mauryas and the Guptas too had flashed in upon India, but history gives only scant and unkind glimpses of their origins; to know them truly one must scan the secret records. Meagre traditions see in them the White Huns, known in India as the Gūjars.

The Solankis or Chaulukyas, were also Agnikulas, fire-born,—says the legend—who sprang from the mystic sacrificial fire-pit at Mount Abu in the southern Rājpuṭ territory.

Another name of these southern Rājpuṭs was Balhāra—a much treasured title! They had called their great Kings Vallabha, beloved, and Rāi, prince. In time these two words were corrupted into Balhāra.

More than five hundred years had passed since the Solankis had set out upon a chequered career. Many a famous ruler had occupied the throne, many a splendid monument marked their triumphs of art and civilization—the wonderful Kailāsa temple is the most lasting of them all. These Solankis were a lesser branch of the main Chaulukya stock, and later were overwhelmed by it with Taila at its head.

The Mahommedan merchant-princes of the middle of the ninth century have left it on record that the sovereign of the Balhāra was the greatest in all India. By the thirteenth century they had passed farther southward and settled down permanently.

Such was the high ancestry of Rāi Surṭān of Bedore and of Tonk-Thoda—a prized and loved possession. But the fiery Afghāns under Silla came down in their might from the north and wrested Tonk-Thoda from the Rāi. Sore at heart he retired to Bedore and vowed himself to ceaseless effort to win back the city for his own. Bedore was within the Mewār dominions at the foot of the Arāvali Hills.

Rāi Surṭān had but one daughter—"and none other child"—Ṭārabāi, 'Star of the Rājpuṭs'. From her babyhood Ṭāra and her father were inseparable. She would sit at his knee and listen eagerly to the tales he had to tell of wars and battle-fields—for a warrior-soul looked out through Ṭāra's flashing eyes.

"I wish I were a boy," she would sigh, "and then I could win back Tonk-Thoda for you when I grew up."

"Yes, child," her father would answer a little absently. Perhaps he, too, could not help wishing that his treasured little girl had been a boy instead, to help in winning back the lost possessions.

As Ṭāra grew older she learnt to hate with quite a fierce hatred that any, even the tiniest portion, of her father's lands should be in alien hands. She felt her father's sorrow over the loss of Tonk-Thoda more than he ever realized. He gave to the sympathetic little girl his whole confidence and she understood his feelings, his position, far better than he knew.

Ṭāra's fervent disposition early showed out its strength and will. She defied restriction and every convention that interfered with her freedom. At first she resented that she had been born a girl. She wanted to be a boy and ride to war and wield the weapons and fight by her father's side. One day as she brooded over it all, one vivid thought flashed into her mind.

"In the old days Rājpuṭ women led to battle—then why not I now?" She made a swift resolve. "I shall, I *shall* train as would my father's son, and I *will* go to battle by his side."

To the despair and horror of all her palace kinswomen she rejected her jewels, her dainty robes,

turned completely away from the slow stately round of insignificant and monotonous duties—and put on a boy's dress! She went boldly to her father and begged permission to be his son in every way. He was touched; he could not refuse the pleading, eager child with her face alight with love for him. He gave his consent. He knew how grave a breach of custom it would be considered and how the girl must face condemnation and ridicule, and how she would suffer in her first blundering efforts to play the boy. Ṭārabāi avoided the women as much as she possibly could, but whenever they had a chance they never failed to point out how unforgivable her conduct was in a woman of high degree. She would certainly never find a husband if she so forgot to be womanly and submissive! But Ṭāra laughed at that and went happily on her way.

She learnt quickly, and soon she could use the bow and spear as well as any. She rode her father's horses, and quickly learnt to manage even the fresh wild creatures from the desert. She grew strong and was brave and beautiful, and by the time she was fourteen rode proudly beside her father on her own fine charger garbed as a prince of her house. Through all these years Rāi Surṭān had from time to time striven to regain Tonk-Thoda, but had always failed. Every time he had returned with the same uncomfortable tale, Ṭāra had shed bitter tears. But

again he decided to make one more effort. Ṭāra begged to go too—she was strong, inured to hardship and could endure the horrors of the battle-field.

"Yes, child," sighed the Rāi, "go with me if thou wilt, but it is rough work—and the result may be the same. Thou wilt but share in thy father's shame, for of glory there may be none."

So Ṭāra went, mounted on a fine charger of the famous Kathiawār breed. She had bow and quiver for arms and her own keen sword with jewelled hilt. How proud she was to ride thus with her father! But it was not for her to taste the pleasures of victory this time—the Afghān was too strong, too well prepared. So with thinned ranks they returned to Bedore, the Rāi dispirited, almost ready to cease from any further effort. He despaired of ever seeing the old flag float over the fortress of Tonk-Thoda, or hear the voices of his people acclaim him their King. But Ṭāra rode erect beside him, to her the defeat was but incentive to fresh effort. When they had settled down she urged her father to fresh plans, to new stratagems, more effective schemes to oust the foe.

The fame of Ṭārabāi's beauty and prowess had spread far and wide, her strange ways were discussed in many a court. But Ṭāra was of purest lineage and so many an envoy came bearing the gifts that meant some prince sought her in marriage. Ṭāra was allowed

to give them her own answer, and of all alike she had but one thing to ask :

"Win back Tonk-Thoda for my father and my hand is thine."

The envoys courteously withdrew to carry back the conditions to their masters—but none were willing to take up the task. The Mohammedan power had grown great, and few states were strong enough to dare incur the displeasure of such a heavy-handed foe.

On a fatal day Jaimal, third son of the old Rāṇā of Mewār set out to claim Ṭāra's hand, and to swear to fulfil the conditions. He swore to them recklessly, glancing boldly at the beautiful girl sitting so fearlessly by her father's side. At once she mistrusted his ready tongue, his bold glances.

"I care not for this Prince, my father," she told him privately, "his vows are too careless and I like not his gaze—it seems in insult."

Thus was Rāi Surṭān warned. He kept a careful watch upon this forward young prince. He understood how Ṭāra's male attire might expose her to insults—and Jaimal had an unfortunate reputation. Rāi Surṭān did not approve either of his method of coming, with none of the usual courtesies and customary delicate advances.

A fugitive, Jaimal had in an idle moment hit upon the idea of being Ṭāra's suitor—he had rushed to carry out his idea. He thought that if he married Ṭāra he

need not fulfil the promise she exacted, but could, instead, use Rāi Surṭān's army for his own purposes, for recent scenes still rankled in his mind.

He and his two elder brothers were always quarrelling, both among themselves and with their father. When they were not at variance with him each tried to turn to himself his father's special favour. They were so foolishly jealous of each other that none of them could bear the idea of the other ruling over ancient Mewār. They discussed it all with their uncle Surājmal, asking him to name the one he thought should rule. But he dared not.

Priṭhvi Rāj, the second son, insisted passionately that the throne was for him—a storm of angry denials burst from the other two.

"Let us all go to Charuni Ḍevī's priestess," urged Priṭhvi, "and ask her to reveal the future." They agreed. Unhappily they made no compact to abide by her prophecy. The temple lay about ten miles to the east of Uḍaipur. When they arrived Priṭhvi and Jaimal flung themselves from their horses and rushed in, thinking that thus they would make an omen of precedence, and tried to make it doubly sure by sitting on the pallet of the priestess. Saṅga followed quickly, and seeing what his brothers had done promptly sat down upon the priestess's panther skin. Surājmal knelt beside him with one knee upon it.

The priestess entered. Pṛithvi wanted to be first, so he at once began to explain the reason of their visit. When he had finished the priestess pointed to Saṅga upon the skin.

"There," she exclaimed, "sits the future ruler of Mewār; and just as his uncle shares the skin with him, so shall he have a portion of the land."

Pṛithvi sprang up madly and drew his sword, resolved there and then to falsify the prophecy. Surājmal promptly intervened, and saved Saṅga's life, but was himself severely wounded. At last Saṅga managed to fly—with five sword-cuts upon his body and one eye ruined. He sprang upon his horse and galloped away, and finally escaped—though Jaimal followed him long, hoping to finish what Pṛithvi had begun.

Saṅga went into voluntary exile, but later came to the throne—as the priestess had said. Pṛithvi was banished by his father and went to Goḍwar, where his energy and prowess soon put him at the head of the little state, which he ruled wisely. Jaimal lay low a while, then went suddenly to Bedore, where we find him an unwelcome suitor for Ṭāra's hand.

After making his promise Jaimal took no further steps whatever towards carrying it out. He loitered about the palace, avoided Rāi Surṭān as much as possible, and lingered near Ṭārabāi. He confused her with bold glances, and with unpleasant flattery, so she grew to dislike and dread his presence. One unlucky

day he rashly broke in upon her. But her father was near and prepared—and his quick ear caught Ṭāra's cry of surprise and distress. He rushed in and struck the dishonourable young Rājput dead.

The Rājput world cried vengeance upon Rāi Surṭān, but the old Rāṇā, Jaimal's father, was wiser. He grieved the loss of his unruly son, but he answered in the famous words that are indicative of the high spirit of chivalry of his day :

" He who has dared to insult the honour of a father and that father in distress has richly deserved his fate."

Very soon Priṭhvi Rāj heard all this. He was a little tired of the monotonous order and peace of Godwar ; he had begun to dream of fresh ventures. If Ṭāra were as brave as all said she was, what a wife she would be ! How much he could accomplish with a spirit like that beside him to urge him on ! He would be delighted to have an excuse for war, to have a tilt at the Afghāns. He would go and offer himself as suitor—the conditions he would gladly try to fulfil.

Then he came courteously, as a suitor should, and asked Rāi Surṭān for his daughter's hand. But it was Ṭāra who answered :

" Win Thoda for my father, and my hand is thine."

And Ṭāra and Priṭhvi looking upon each other fell in love. He was so handsome, proud and gallant

and yet so gentle that Ṭāra's heart was captured. His firm answer delighted her.

"Ay, Thoda I vow to restore, else am I no true Rājpuṭ."

He immediately got together a band of five hundred of his own horsemen, specially chosen, and soon was ready to set out against the Afghān. Ṭāra insisted upon going with him, already she wanted to share his dangers and his victories.

Tonk-Thoda happened to be unprepared for an attack, and somehow Pṛithvi had managed to know it—through spies perhaps. The Afghāns in Thoda, being Mohammedans, were engrossed in the Mohurram—the yearly mourning of the Muslim world over the martyrdom in the desert of the Prophet's grandsons, Husein and Hasan. Pṛithvi knew that every Musalmān would be absorbed in the ceremonies, his thoughts far from war. Nor was an attack from Rāi Surṭān expected—he had been repulsed so recently. Of course everyone had heard of Ṭārabāi's vow, but they had laughed at it, especially when it brought about the Jaimal incident.

Pṛithvi, Ṭāra, and their cavalcade reached the outskirts of Tonk-Thoda without having caused any alarm. They arrived at just that moment when the mourning, wailing crowds were pressing round the Ṭāziya in which lay the effigies of the martyrs. All the crowd was in the grip of strong and violent

emotions which led them to flagellate their bared breasts and backs with cruel iron thongs, or sob and shout till they fell exhausted.

Prithvi left the little army carefully posted outside the city walls. Then he, Ṭāra, and a bosom friend went boldly into the city and mingled with the crowd. The Afghān Chief was on a balcony overlooking the crowded square where the people surged. With suspicious eyes he watched everyone, ready to detect the slightest indication of unrest—for he knew that the old inhabitants, Rāi Surṭān's subjects, were always plotting to help their former ruler to win back the place. Instantly he noted the three strangers, armed too! He flushed angrily.

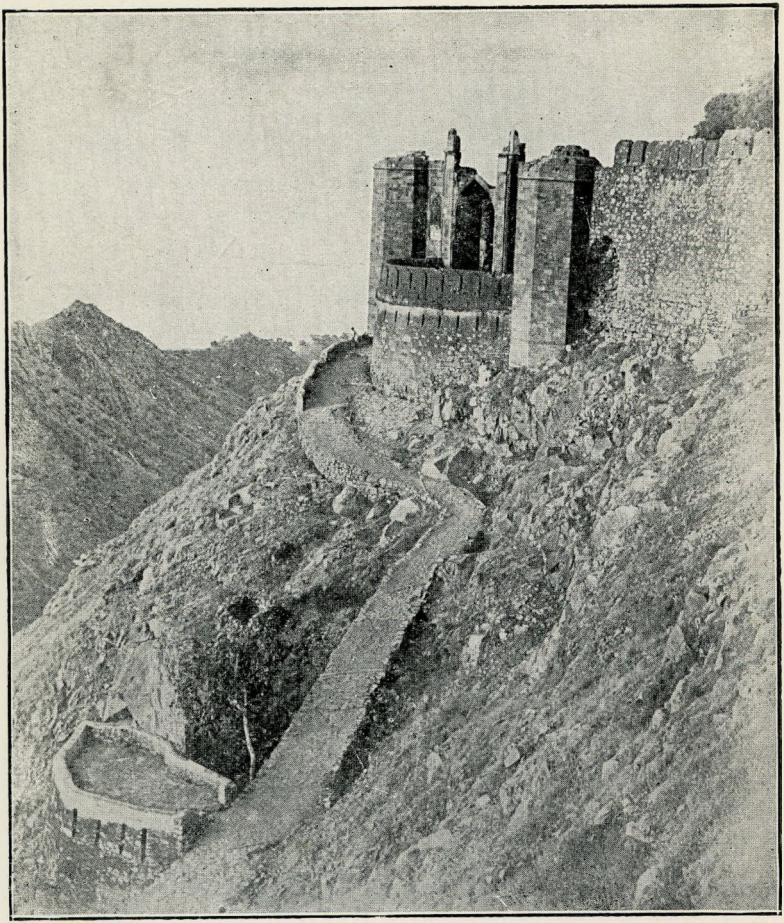
"Who are those stangers?" he demanded peremptorily—"whence come they?"

In answer a long keen lance sped from Prithvi's hand, from Ṭāra's bow a swift arrow followed, and the Chief lay writhing in death agonies. Taking advantage of the nerveless moment of amazement that followed, the three pushed through the swaying crowd. But loud cries followed them, the people strained to catch its purport—they understood!

They turned in fury upon the intrepid three. But old friends jostled the raging Musalmāns, and tried clumsily to make a clear way for them. They were nearing the gate, the mob close upon them. Horror! a huge elephant blocked the way. Desperately Ṭāra

drew her sword and slashed the great beast across his trunk. With a fierce mad scream of pain he dashed into the crowd, and trampled and tore savagely. The cries of hate and rage turned to shrieks of fear of being torn and mangled by the enraged elephant . . . The three slipped swiftly through the gate, still followed by a great number of angry foes. Out the three rushed and after them the yelling crowd—straight upon a grim line of waiting horsemen. Utterly staggered they tried to rush back to the shelter of the city. The three flung themselves upon their horses, gave the command, and the horsemen dashed straight upon the wild, confused crowd. They trampled through the panic-stricken people—easy prey to their keen swords. They forced their way through the seething streets till the open square was won. They called upon the city to surrender; Thoda was won! The old citizens set up glad shouts . . . The Afghān's followers slunk away as quickly and as quietly as they could, carrying their tale of woe to other Muslim cities.

Then Ṭāra and Pṛithvi sent for Rāi Surṭān, who came amidst a circle of ancient retainers. His people hailed him with great joy and held high festival over the restoration of the ancient régime. Very graciously Pṛithvi, with charming courtesy, led the Rāi to the throne, once more lord of Thoda.



TĀRĀGARH, NEAR AJMERE

Very soon followed the marriage of Ṭāra and Pṛithvi Rāj. The gorgeous ceremonies took many days. Gladly and proudly Ṭāra laid her hand in Pṛithvi's to pace with him around the sacred fire. In his love she gloried, in his honour she trusted utterly, and she reverenced him with that utter reverence which high-born Hindū women seem to have naturally for the husband who is brave and noble, and of which they alone know the full secret. Joyously Ṭāra carried in her strong little hands the ṭhāli (platter) in which were *pān supāri* and the bottle of wine that every Rājpuṭ bride takes to her husband on her marriage night.

For sometime the newly married pair rested happily with Rāi Surṭān, for he was loth to part with his 'children'. It was good that they did so. The Muslim ruler of Ajmere was angered at the capture of Tonk-Thoda and determined to go and turn out the Rāi again. But Pṛithvi was too quick for him. He marched out, with Ṭāra by his side, surprised the Ajmere lord, defeated him completely and took Ajmere for his own.

Then Pṛithvi and his lovely bride went away to the hill-fortress of Komulmeer. There he built up a strong fortress, an impregnable home. The outer walls rose thick and massive with towers and battlements everywhere. Above all rose the rocky hill—with every point protected, right up to the very summit,

crowned by the famous ' cloud-palace '. The citizens lived in peace under Pṛithvi and his Queen. One thousand warriors dwelt with them there, men of marvellous strength and wondrous wise in battle lore ; men who swore fealty to their liege, nor ever swerved from their vows ; men who were pure knights and rode abroad ' redressing human wrongs '.

Pṛithvi's thoughts often turned to Mewār. He wondered if all were well with his father. He and Ṭāra decided to go and see for themselves how fared the ancient house. They found old and lonely Rāṇā Raimal sore beset. Surājmal, who had knelt upon the priestess's skin, had succeeded in persuading himself that the priestess must have meant the whole kingdom. Anyhow he tried to make it so. He plunged into plots, intrigues and schemes—a precarious throne the goal. He had gathered several Chieftains under his banner and had marched against the Rāṇā, who was unprepared, but fought as best he could.

Pṛithvi had with him his thousand warriors, and with them whirled down upon the battle-field, where the Rāṇā was nigh worsted, and weak and faint from twenty-two wounds. The battle went against Surājmal and his allies . . . Ṭāra fought too. Many reeled from their saddles beneath her lusty blows. A charmed life she herself seemed to bear, for flying arrows and lances and flashing swords

never seemed to touch her; the old Rāṇā was quite astounded and wondered if indeed she were really human or some goddess in a woman's form.

When the day was done and the two parties bivouacked for the night, Pṛithvi left Ṭāra and his father and went to visit his uncle. A strange meeting: "unique in the details of strife, perhaps since the origin of war," says Tod. Surājmal sat dressing the wounds inflicted by Pṛithvi, and Pṛithvi's bandages showed where his uncle's sword had bitten deep.

"Well, uncle, how are your wounds?" cried Pṛithvi as he entered.

"Quite healed, my child, since I have the pleasure of seeing you!" replied Surājmal cheerily.

"Have you anything to eat, uncle, I am very hungry!" exclaimed Pṛithvi.

Food was brought at once. The large brass platter was set between the two and they ate from it heartily, discussing the while the fortunes of war. They finished; *pān supāri* was brought. Pṛithvi took this calmly, knowing that poison might lurk within the folded leaf. He took leave of his uncle with all due courtesies, and quietly said:

"You and I will end our battle in the morning, uncle?"

"Very well, my child, come early."

There was hard and bitter fighting next day. Victory was again with the Rāṇā—due in no small

measure to Ṭāra. Tireless she pressed the foe, ever in the thickest of the fight, and every warrior who acknowledged her as Queen strove mightily that his deeds should be no less than hers. At last Surājmal's army broke and fled, and with them a kinsman, Sārangḍeo, who had somehow incurred Priṭhvi's violent hatred.

Surājmal though beaten did not submit ; and Priṭhvi swore that he should not have "as much land in Mewār as would cover a needle's point".

"And you," retorted Surājmal, "may redeem only as much as will suffice for bed." Surājmal was pursued and in a stockade made his last stand. Over the camp-fire he and Sārangḍeo talked long. Only the murmur of their voices, the crackling of the fire and the deep breathing of weary soldiers broke the stillness . . . A sudden stamping and the crashing down of brambles. In dashed Priṭhvi on his great war-horse.

"My nephew, it would seem," remarked Surājmal as he was flung into the arms of Sārangḍeo.

He begged a truce. "If I die," he said, "it matters nothing ; but you—if you die what will become of Chiṭṭoor ? And if you die here my name will be disgraced for ever !"

They embraced—this strange pair !

"And what were you doing when I came in, my uncle ?"

"Just talking after dinner, my child."

"But you were very carelessly guarded—and with me so near!"

"But a man must sleep—and what other home have I?"

Next day they went to a temple near by to offer a buffalo to the dread Goddess Kāli. When about to offer the sacrifice Pṛithvi turned suddenly upon Sārangḍeo.

"Kāli loves better a traitor's head," he said savagely. They fell to fighting; and at last Sārangḍeo was overcome and Pṛithvi offered his head upon the altar.

Surājmal gave up his struggle. The Mewār throne was not for him. He settled at Deola, where he built up a small kingdom for himself, subduing the aboriginal tribes and civilizing them. In time he was sovereign over a thousand villages over which, it is said, his descendants still rule. Thus for Surājmal the prophecy came true, for Ḍeola was a small corner of the Mewār kingdom.

The fame of Ṭāra and of Pṛithvi grew ever as the years passed. Many were their exploits, countless their deeds of breathless daring, great their charity and good will.

One day a message came from Pṛithvi's sister; she had married a Sirohi prince who showed no trace of Rājpuṭ strength and honour. He was

curish and base; he took opium to excess. He treated his wife shamefully, till her Rājput blood boiled at the insults he heaped upon her. At last in exasperation she wrote:

"Brother Pṛithvi, come, I pray thee. I, thy sister, Rājputṛī, will bear no more of these insults. A barbarian is my husband, insensible to honour, ignorant of the courtesies due to women. Take me hence, I pray thee, back to our ancestral home where is still the old and stately rule. In shame I tell it thee, my brother, but when of the essence of the flower my husband has too deeply taken, then, alas! he loses his head. He thrusts me under the bed, and leaves me there. I dare not move for in his savage moods he is cruel. So I, Rājaputṛī, cower there, like some base dog, beneath the bed. Oh! come, take me hence, ere my shame grow greater than I can bear."

Pṛithvi went at once to Ṭāra and showed her the letter, and asked her what she thought.

"Let us go at once," she said, "we will punish the Prince and bring away our sister with us."

And even as she spoke a dim fear crept into her heart, a nameless dread of evil about to fall.

But Pṛithvi would not that even his beloved Ṭāra should witness his sister's shame. He must go alone. For the first time Ṭāra's high courage failed her—for

a moment she clung to her husband quivering with fear.

"But, dear one," expostulated Pṛithvi, "why this strange dread; 'tis but a simple errand on which I go."

"I fear," murmured Ṭāra, "as never yet I have feared."

Then with a great effort she controlled herself. "Go, dear, go alone if thou wilt; but my heart is heavy with foreboding. I will watch ceaselessly for thy coming, and no peace shall I know till once more thou art safe within these walls."

Pṛithvi cheered her with brave words. He set out, and at midnight reached the Sirohi palace. He scaled the walls and sought out his sister's apartments. She almost strieked when she saw Pṛithvi at her husband's side, his dagger already at the drunken Prince's throat. Swift visions of the burning pyre and the hot curling flames flashed in upon her mind.

"Slay him not," she entreated with her hand upon Pṛithvi's arm.

"Nay, my sister, only his death can wipe away thy shame," said Pṛithvi sternly.

"But I do not want thee to slay him," sobbed his sister. "It would not be well for his blood to be upon thy hands."

Just then Prabhoo Rao awoke. His muddled brain could not account for Pṛithvi's presence there.

"Why—why hast thou come?" he asked dully of Pṛithvi.

"To teach thee Rājput manners!" answered Pṛithvi.

Prabhoo saw the anger gleaming in his eyes, saw the dagger in his hand, and fear sobered him. He had no wish to die. He muttered thickly:

"For the sake of my name do not kill me . . . what do you want me to do?"

Pṛithvi thought a bitter lesson might do him good. He forced the Prince down upon his knees, and then—oh shame unutterable!—made him bend at the feet of his wife and place her shoes upon his head, and humbly beg her forgiveness. The Prince did it, all trembling with fear and rage. Then Pṛithvi made him rise and embrace his wife and himself. Thus it was ended—Pṛithvi thought.

But the insult was too much even for poor besotted Prabhoo Rao. He meditated some revenge. For a few days Pṛithvi stayed at Sirohi and all seemed tranquil, and Prabhoo honoured him in every possible way. At parting he pressed upon Pṛithvi some of the famed Sirohi sweets and of which Pṛithvi was inordinately fond. Off he went with them, rejoicing to be going home to Ṭara. By and bye he grew hungry and began to eat the sweets. He could see Komulmeer in the distance and sang aloud for joy. The sweets were nearly all gone . . . A sudden

pain! Blind and giddy he struggled up on his horse. The pain ceased; he sat erect—again that excruciating pain . . . He knew what it meant. What a fool he had been to trust the sweets! He spurred his horse and gripped his saddle hard to prevent him falling when the paroxysm of pain was at its worst. Ṭāra and Komulmeer!—how to reach them? Ah, there was Mama Devi's little shrine. He would go there and send a messenger . . . He reached the shrine, stumbled from his horse as best he could and staggered in upon the astonished priests.

"I am poisoned," he gasped, "send for Ṭārabāi—quick—or it will be too late!"

A messenger raced to Komulmeer and gave his dreadful message. Ṭāra came flying upon her swiftest horse, praying with an intense inward agony that she might find Pṛithvi still alive. But, alas, death was swifter even than she. Only Pṛithvi's body awaited her, from it the soul had fled. Great and terrible was Ṭāra's grief for a brief while and in that anguish her brave heart broke. Beside Pṛithvi's body she flung herself and wailed out in uncontrollable anguish:

"My husband, oh! my husband!"

Then she grew calm again, and as the great warriors gathered round, in their sorrow silent and stern, she gave her last commands to them. Then the pyre was builded high and upon it was laid the

body of Prithvi Rāj. Ṭāra mounted it too, and took his dear head upon her lap and passed out amid the flames into the other world 'beyond the veil' to meet him, and be with him.

A MUSULMĀNI RULER

Towards the middle of the thirteenth century India was in a state of incredible confusion, especially the northern part from Bengal westward right into Persia—and even beyond. Fate decreed that slave Kings should sit upon the Imperial throne at Delhi and stain with every cruelty the history of the Motherland. Shāhab-ud-ḍīn, or Mohammed Ghori, as he was better known, had no sons, so he took great pleasure in bringing up Turki slaves, little foreseeing the parts they were to play in the future. When he died three at least of these slaves were in prominent positions and exercising much influence. Kutb-ud-ḍīn in India was paving the way for the dominance of the 'Slave-Kings'; Eldoz was in power at Ghazni; Nāsir-u-ḍīn Kabāchī had much authority in Multan and Sind.

Kutb when but a babe had been bought by a wealthy person who had him taught Persian and Arabic. When his owner died Kutb was sold to a merchant, who made a present of him to Shāhab-u-ḍīn. His life was an adventurous one, as was natural to such unsettled times, but his character was manly,

generous and frank. He married the daughter of Eldoz, he gave his sister in marriage to Nāsir and his daughter to Altamsh—another promising slave.

When Kutb died his son Ārām succeeded him, but was not capable of directing the lawless spirit of his time; before long he was dethroned by Altamsh who became the Emperor.

There seems to be a certain amount of probability in the story that Altamsh was the son of a great Tartary Chief and that his brothers, like Joseph's, sold him into slavery. After passing several times from one master to another he eventually came to Ghazni where Mohammed Ghori heard of his beauty and unusual talents and wished to buy him, but his price was too high. He therefore "allowed Kutb-ud-dīn as a favour to purchase him for fifty thousand pieces of silver". The slave-boy rose steadily in his master's favour, was given his freedom and married one of Kutb's daughters.

There were many children born to Altamsh, but the most remarkable one of them all was the Sultāna Rezia. During her childhood Rezia must have seen much of the trouble that seethed everywhere in India, for it was during her father's reign that Chengiz Khān burst in upon the Mahommedan world.

Chengiz Khān was a Moghul petty chief and "most violent enemy of mankind". He and his hordes left always the most appalling slaughter and

destruction in their track. Their appearance was "an event which changed the whole face of Asia". Altamsh did not incur their displeasure so was saved a visitation from them. He ruled in comparative peace and all Hindustān acknowledged Delhi as paramount. He received investiture from the far Khalīf of Bagdad, and that made his position secure from the religious point of view.

From her father Rezia inherited an unusual beauty, sufficient, said one enthusiastic writer, "to ripen the corn in the blade". She was wise as well as prudent, far beyond what was usual even in the best of her day. Her father was exceedingly fond and proud of his gifted daughter. He educated her well, so she could read the Korān correctly for herself. He also trained her thoroughly in politics, so that, as Ferishta says, "Rezia Begum was endowed with every princely virtue," and then he quaintly adds, "and those who scrutinize her actions most severely will find in her no fault but that she was a woman!"

Unhappily Rezia's mother was of a passionate nature and of cruel unprincipled ways, and rendered the Zenāna life unhealthy and even undesirably mischievous. But such conditions seem only to have made the Princess more thoughtful. In spite of it all she remained kind and pure and was highly honoured and idolized by the whole of her father's court.

Altamsh specially guided Rezia's love of beauty, and with him she watched the building of some of that wonderful column, the Kutb Minar, at Delhi. The Minar had been begun by Kutb who wanted it to be the finest thing of its kind with its fluted shaft and exquisitely balanced proportions. Upon it Altamsh caused to be inscribed the most eulogistic inscriptions describing his own virtues and qualities, and probably Rezia helped in the composition of them.

They run thus :

The great King ; the exalted Emperor ; master of the necks of the people ; the pride of the Kings of Arabia and Ajni ; God's shadow on earth ; the son of the world and of faith ; redresser of Islām and the Musalmān ; the crown of kings and princes ; the spreader of justice among mankind ; great among the conquering powers ; the light of the people of light ; the helped from the sky ; the conqueror of his enemies ; the bright star of the firmament of sovereignty ; spreader of justice and mercy ; the refuge of the countries of the earth ; the revealer of the words of God ; Abul Muzaffer Altamsh, Sultān, ally of the Amir-ul-Momenia. May God perpetuate his country and his reign, and exalt his authority and his prestige.

From which it is obvious that the 'Slave King' had an exalted opinion of himself and of his position !

Princess Rezia was so thoroughly master of state affairs that when Altamsh went southwards in 1226 with his huge army on a conquering expedition, he left her in charge of the Government. To the high officials and nobles of his court he said :

" Know that the burden of power, too heavy for my sons, though there were twenty of them, is not so for the delicate Rezia ; she has in her more spirit than they all."

Rezia showed herself thoroughly competent for the task entrusted to her. It must have been a task of great difficulty, for there were unruly brothers to remember, a cruel and unscrupulous mother to keep the peace with, and two factions in the kingdom to prevent breaking out into open hostilities. Rezia prayed most earnestly to God to help her and give her wisdom and strength. She ruled with such firmness and tact that all, even her brothers, recognized how wise had been the choice of Altamsh, who, when he returned from his conquests, could find no words adequate enough with which to praise his loved and talented daughter. Her taste of power did not spoil Rezia ; she made no foolish efforts to keep the reins of government in her own hands. She gladly resigned her leadership and subsided into her ordinary place.

A few years later Altamsh was setting out upon a journey to Multān when he died suddenly. Rezia

was sorely grieved over his death for she loved him very deeply—there seemed to have been a remarkable bond of comradeship between father and daughter.

Altamsh's son, Rukn-u-ḍīn, became ruler, but he had no strength to hold his throne. He was a weak man, foolish too. His money and his jewels he threw to dancing women or to buffoons. He did not trouble about the Government, leaving that entirely to his mother—who dominated him. Before long she had driven practically everyone into rebellion, so cruel, so tyrannous was she. In seven months Rukn was deposed. Who should rule? The majority of the nobles turned to Princess Rezia; they hailed her as Sultāna. The old vizīr who had served her brother and father could not bend his proud head to a woman's rule; he headed the party which opposed her elevation. He gathered an army to attack Delhi, and defeated the troops of the Sultāna. It looked as though hers would be but a brief reign.

But the Sultāna saw where the weaknesses were in each party, and played them off against one another so cleverly that dissensions were quickly sown and they no longer acted in unity, and in consequence their schemes failed entirely. Then the Sultāna seized upon those whom she thought most dangerous had them put to death, and through the exercise of a rare magnanimity made friends of the rest.

Sultāna Rezia governed with unusual ability. She attended to everything. She appeared every day seated on the throne, robed in male attire and with quick judgment and insight righted those things that were unjust or oppressive. The people trusted in her and felt secure. It seemed as though a long and prosperous reign stretched before the gifted Sultāna. But no, she needs must fall in love—and with a slave! Of slave origin herself and related closely to influential families which could boast of no better descent, it scarce would seem to have mattered. But the Sultāna's lover was a different kind of slave, an Abyssinian, and only her Master of the Horse.

The Sultāna truly loved the handsome ebon Abyssinian, and she purposed marrying him. To pave the way she created him Amir al Omrāh—commander-in-chief. Thereby she offended beyond forgiveness all her proud nobles. Passion had robbed her of her usual fine tact and keen sensitiveness as to what was best to do.

Altunia, a Turkish chief, was the first to break away. Sultāna Rezia promptly went out to meet him at Batinda. But sedition had been at work in the Sultāna's army and the soldiers mutinied on the way. They seized the Abyssinian and killed him. Then her generals seized the Sultāna and hurriedly gave her over into Altunia's hands. They then went

rapidly back to Delhi and put her cruel and murderous brother Behrām upon the throne.

But Sultāna Rezia was not beaten. She so won Altunia by her beauty and cleverness that he married her. Though a rebel he seems to have been a brave and able man and possibly had good cause for the step he took, and the Sultāna respected him.

They were married amid the rejoicings of Altunia's people. After all the celebrations were over they kept quiet for a while. Then together they gathered a large army, unfurled the Imperial banner, and set out for Delhi.

But fate had turned against the Sultāna. Despite every effort her army was twice badly beaten, and finally she and her husband were taken prisoners. Nothing, not even her beauty, nor her services to her people, served to avert the end. She and Altunia were condemned to death. She had ruled only three and a half years.

With the death of Sultāna Rezia closed all prospect of peace for India. The 'Slave-Kings' who followed her were terrible men, wholly unworthy of the high title of King.

THE EMPEROR'S ONLY WIFE

JEHĀNGĪR was dead; with him had died with marvellous suddenness the influence of his famous consort, Nur Jehān.[1] For years she had made the history of Musalmān India; after Jehāngīr's death her name is never seen in a single historian's pages.

To Nur Jehān her neice, Mumṭāza Zemāni,[2] was successor. She was the daughter of Asif Khān, brother of Nur Jehān, he who put the great Queen under restraint while he placed Shāh Jehān upon the throne, and, for a time, juggled as he would with the Empire.

Shāh Jehān was the cleverest of Jehāngīr's sons—though not the eldest. Those older than he were removed from his path and he ascended the throne. In accordance with the passion for luxury and beauty so characteristic of the 'Great Moghuls,' Shāh Jehān plunged into extravagant expenditure for lavish entertainments where everything was exquisite and costly; and he erected magnificent buildings.

[1] 'Light of the World.'

[2] 'The most exalted of the age.'

A new Delhi rose, far more splendid than the old one—a city of wide streets lined with trees and bordered with shops of which the present Chandni Chauk is still a noted remnant. The great Mosque is even to-day a marvel of splendour, and on Jamna's banks grew up an immense fortified palace of spacious courts and marble halls and domes of gold.

It was for Shāh Jehān, 'the magnificent,' that the wonderful 'peacock throne' was made, a priceless bauble destined to strange vicissitudes. In the form of a peacock the glorious throne glowed and scintillated with sapphires, emeralds, rubies, masses of diamonds and other precious stones. Six and a half millions was Tavernier's estimate of its worth—and he was a jeweller

Upon the anniversary of his accession Shāh Jehān planned innumerable extravagances. He was weighed against precious stones, vessels filled with them were waved around his head and poured over him (to avert misfortune), and then they were thrown to the scrambling spectators, or presented to favourites. One million six hundred thousand pounds were spent upon this one occasion, says Khāfi Khān, the historian. Happily none of this expenditure depended upon undue taxation of the people, or brought about bankruptcy of his own finances.

Amid these brilliant and luxurious surroundings moved Mumtāza Zemāni, wife of Jemāl Khān, one

of the first noblemen of Shāh Jehān's Court. All who saw her fell to rapturous praise of her beauty—second only was she to the imcomparable Nur Jehān.

It was the *Naroze*, a special Moghul festival held on the ninth day of the new year. In the very heart of the palace—the Seraglio—Moghul ladies held high carnival. They kept stalls and sold exquisite stuffs, delicate embroideries, gay ribbons and heavy cloths of gold—fabrics from every part of the world. To these festivals the King always came to bargain with the fair stall-holders, who were for once in the year free of barred windows, free of curtained, guarded doorways, free of the shapeless swathings that impeded their movements when they went beyond their own doors. The Emperor could therefore judge for himself of the beauty and charm of the ladies who moved in the highest social circles. He went round buying from each fair lady-merchant. Sometimes his haggling would so annoy one of them that she would scold him soundly and send him about his business—though they did ask impossibly high prices for their wares.

Such a *bouleversement* of the customary rules naturally gave occasion for much license ; and often the happiness of many a home was destroyed utterly, never to be restored.

For one such Naroze Shāh Jehāngīr ordered that all the ladies should sell precious stones, and he

commanded his nobles to go and purchase them, no matter what they cost.

Mumṭāza Zemāni held a stall ; and so charming and gracious and lovely was she that her stock soon vanished, even though she demanded outrageous prices for them. She had nothing left when Shāh Jehān appeared. He looked around at the fair sellers and at once his eye was caught by the beauty of Mumṭāza Zemāni. He made his way to her stall.

" What have you to sell, dear lady ? " he asked.

" Only one large diamond, sire," she replied, " but its price is very high."

" Will you let me see it ? " inquired the Prince smilingly.

" Gladly," said Mumṭāza Zemāni, and she showed him a large piece of sugar-candy diamond shaped and quite transparent.

" What do you ask for it ? " asked Shāh Jehān, his eyes twinkling.

" One lakh, sire," replied Mumṭāza calmly.

The Prince promptly paid the money. Then he fell to talking with her and was quite captivated by her charm and wit. With subtle compliment and deftly turned flatteries he so won Mumṭāza that when he at last invited her to the palace she weakly consented.

Of course the gossips of those days were as the gossips of all times and places, so Jemāl Khān was

quickly apprised of what had happened. He was furious; it was not an honour the Prince[1] had shown to him. When Mumtāza Zemāni at last came home he absolutely refused to see her. But Mumtāza was not prepared to sue for peace. She at once wrote to her royal lover complaining of her husband's treatment.

Shāh Jehān flew into a rage when he received the letter. He ordered that Jemāl Khān be taken instantly to the elephant garden that the great beasts might tread him to death. Jemāl Khān was not brave enough to face such an awful fate. He begged the Prince for an interview, which was reluctantly accorded him.

"Sire," stammered the unfortunate man, "my apparent coldness to my wife was not meant as an insult to your highness, but as a compliment. Thou hast honoured my house unutterably by thy royal notice; but I am not worthy to wear again the jewel that my Prince has worn."

Shāh Jehān was mollified, but he felt contempt for the terror-stricken man before him. He had nothing to fear from him, so he let him live.

"Thou shalt have command over five thousand horses!" exclaimed Jemāl, possibly thinking such an honour sufficient compensation for the loss of his lovely wife whom he calmly took for himself, nor

[1] He was not yet Emperor when this took place.

was the lovely Mumṭāza unwilling to make the change.

Later on Shāh Jehān became the Emperor, and amid the most gorgeous ceremonies Mumṭāza was made his wife. She loved the Emperor and he returned her love a thousandfold. He never added another to share her place, a thing exceedingly rare in a Moghul Emperor's harem.

Fourteen years passed and Mumṭāza grew always in the love and esteem of all the Emperor's household. Unlike Nur Jehān she had no love of intrigue, no desire to rule or feel that the pulse of the nation throbbed to her administration. She controlled others, and influenced them strongly, but it was through the warmth of her affections, her loyalty and goodness that she did so, and not through any effort to dominate by force of will.

Mumṭāza had many children and just before the birth of her last one she felt a queer sense of disaster, felt that her end was near.

"Beloved, I shall die," she said to Shāh Jehān, "and ere I die two things I beg of thee, two promises I want thee to make to me."

"Light of my heart," answered the Emperor, "ask and it shall be as thou wilt."

"Promise me, then, that thou wilt not marry again; I could not bear to think that another's children should quarrel with mine over your

riches, your love, and the right to the throne. Promise me, also, that thou wilt erect over my body a tomb such as will give immortality to my name."

Shâh Jehân sadly and fervently promised to do exactly as she wished. Mumtâza died in child-birth and left the Emperor in bitter, lonely anguish. He had loved his wife with a devotion so great that it seemed his heart must break when he lost her.

He kept his promises, though he was often urged to marry for political reasons.

There is but one God for the soul, he said, and but one moon for the sun.

He raised over the remains of his adored Empress the far-famed Tâj Mahal. It is still one of the loveliest things on earth, marvellously pure in design, marvellously beautiful in appearance—and enduring.

Of white marble the Tâj stands on Jamna's banks, near Agra, ethereally lovely and perfectly poised. It is a dream in marble, simple yet intricate, a marvel of all that is glorious and gracious in combination of curve and line.

The Emperor planned that his own remains should eventually rest beneath an equally magnificent structure on the other side of the river, and that the blue waters flowing between the two should be spanned by a fairy-like bridge of marble. But he fell sick and died before he could commence the

building of the second Tāj, and as no one attempted to carry out his wishes his body was placed beside that of his first and only wife—'the most exalted of the age'.

THE GREAT MARĀTHA QUEEN

Ānanḍa Rao Shinde, cultivator, of the Ḍhangar caste, had no children—and he grieved thereat.

Neither he nor his wife knew what further to do—they had visited shrine after shrine, had laid rich gifts at the feet of many an unresponsive Ḍevī, but no child blessed their silent home. They had given up making pilgrimages—it seemed so futile.

One day a Sāḍhu came to Pāṭhardi, the name of the village where the old people lived. He seemed a good man and worthy, so they put their grief before him. The Sāḍhu promised to help them, gave to the wife some anjarā and told them both to worship at the shrine of Shrī Jagaḍambara at Kolhapur. For one whole year, faithfully and without deviation, they worshipped there.

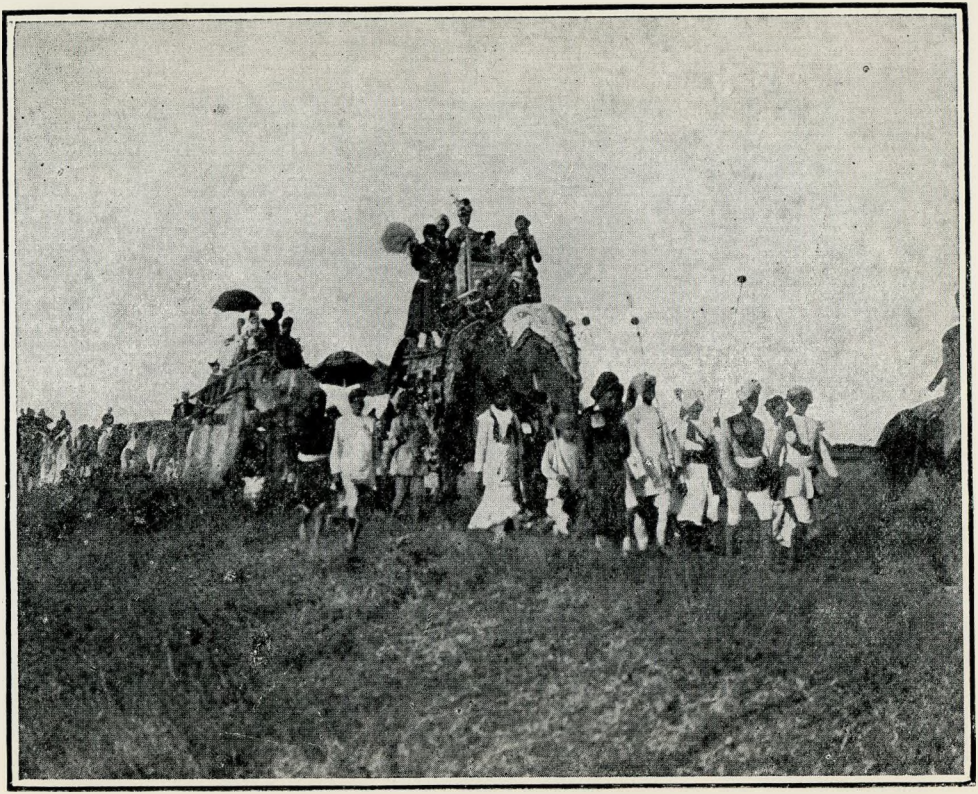
One night the Ḍevī appeared to Ānanḍa Rao and told him that their loving worship had pleased her so much that she herself would take birth as their daughter. That same night his wife dreamed that a Suvāsinī appeared, carrying a wee baby girl in her arms. The Ḍevī put the child into her eager arms, marked her forehead, and then vanished.

Husband and wife were very happy. They went back to their home, and later on Ahalyabāi was born —it was the year 1735. The child's horoscope showed her future plainly : A Rāja would choose her as his wife ; as a Queen she would rule long years, and her name would shine immortal in the annals of the Motherland.

Ahalya spent a happy childhood in her quiet Indian home. She was studious by nature, loving those ancient books the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhāraṭa. She was never accounted beautiful, but she was very sweet of disposition and an unusual dignity showed in all her actions ; she possessed above all a marvellous power of winning people's hearts and keeping them loyal to her.

Ahalya was nine years old when her parents thought it was time for her to be betrothed. Her father tried to fulfil the predictions of her horoscope. He sought high and low for the scion of some royal family to whom to marry her. He could not find a single chance of doing so. He was disappointed. Then both he and his wife decided that Ahalya's destiny would surely fulfil itself without any effort on their part so they abode patiently, waiting for what would happen.

The Marātha armies were moving southwards. They had been victorious in northern India led by Raghunāth Rao, Dada Peshwar and Malhārao Holkar.



THE MARRIAGE PROCESSION

On their homeward way they rested at Pāṭhardi. In front of Ānanda Rao's house stood the temple of Shrī Māruṭi, where the Peshwas invariably did homage when on war intent. Ahalyabāi happened to come to the temple when old Malhārao was there. He, and his suite, were struck by the almost regal dignity of so young a girl. He asked her name and parentage. Ahalya's teacher was nearby and he told all the story of her birth. Malhārao declared that no more suitable wife could be found for his own son, Khande Rao. Satisfactory arrangements were soon made, and one month later the wedding was carried through with great magnificence.

Ahalyabāi was happy in her new surroundings. She proved a tender devoted daughter to stern old Malhārao and to his imperious and impatient wife. She tried to live up to the ideals of the great women of the past—Sīṭā especially. She avoided intrigues, shunned petty actions, and cleansed the palace of gossip by her frank speech and open ways. Malhārao encouraged her to understand the government of the State. When he went on distant wars he entrusted much to her and she was careful and thrifty in her management.

In 1754 the Bhils, a mountain tribe, were troublesome. Khande Rao went to punish them, and was killed in the struggle. He left one son Māli Rao and one daughter, Machchābāi, who married Jaswanṭ Rao.

Ahalya longed to follow Khande Rao, to be a Saṭi, but Malhārao begged her not to think of such a thing.

"O child!" he entreated, "I am old and sonless. Live thou and comfort me. If thou goest also then shall I be left desolate. Stay with me for the kingdom shall be thine. Check thy sorrow, little one, and give to me thy comfort and thy assistance."

Malhārao dreamed of a Marātha Empire—all India beneath one rule. A great emprise truly, but Malhārao was dauntless . . . Success loomed certain, for slowly northern India was bending to his pressure, even Delhi was in his hands. Then he died.

Māli Rao ascended the throne of Indore. But he was strangely, perversely cruel and unfit to rule; happily for all he died nine months afterwards . . . Who should rule? Ahalyabāi announced that she would take government upon herself, giving her word that she would do her utmost to rule wisely and well.

There were of course those who thought that a woman upon the throne meant they could the more readily push their own interests. But Ahalyabāi understood human nature, and she unerringly selected for the highest posts those who were the most capable, not those who flattered her the most. She wanted able and compassionate ministers, not extortionate oppressors of the poor and weak.

Intriguers were thus checked; they resented her methods—well, they would depose her! These

malcontents were led by Gaṅgāḍhar Jaswanṭ, court priest. He had dreamed of favour and influence and, who knows ?—of a throne.

"Thou art a woman," he said to the Queen, "too frail for this great self-imposed task. Place some male child of thy race upon the throne, and put upon me the burden of responsibility. Thou canst then retire and devote thyself to the religious practices that best become a woman and a widow."

"I, a Rāja's wife, a Rāja's mother," answered Ahalyabāi a little proudly and severely, "shall put no other over myself. In religious matters I obey thy injunctions ; in state matters thou hast no concern."

Gaṅgāḍhar was deeply offended, but said no more. He would teach her a lesson, however, and prove to her that ruling was not so easy when there was powerful influence against her. With the curious lack of foresight that intriguants generally show he wrote covertly to Rāghoba, uncle to Madhu Rao, the Peshwa.

"Come," wrote Gaṅgāḍhar, "this Kingdom is thine for the taking—a woman rules it."

Rāghoba, a powerful and influential man, greedily took up the proposal. He carefully gathered together a large band of influential but disappointed men. When they felt that they were sufficiently strong they wrote to Ahalyabāi asking her to adopt a child and appoint a Regent.

"The Rājputs and the English threaten the kingdom," they pointed out, "and thou, a woman, wilt not be able to take the field against them. Accede then to our plan, which will be wisest for all."

But Ahalyabāi had carefully watched all the movements of the conspirators. She sent them word saying:

"I know all your plans and all the mischief you contemplate. Evil must be the fruit of evil deeds . . . Be careful how you offend your Queen. I have no fear of your covert threats, and am ready to defeat your purposes."

Rāghoba was angry. "This haughty woman!" he exclaimed, "How arrogant she is! I will humble her pride. Malhārao was only the Peshwa's servant; I will brook no insult from the widow of his son!"

But before the conspirators had time to take any further steps they were all suddenly arrested and sent to prison. They were astounded; someone amongst them must have been a spy, else how could the Queen have known so accurately whom to arrest.

Rāghoba was soon set free and allowed to stay as guest for a time at Indore. He was much impressed by the Queen's ability, her knowledge of statecraft, her management of men and affairs. But he never really forgave her the indignity of his arrest and imprisonment, brief though it had been.

Gaṅgāḍhar thought it his wisest policy to tender his apologies to Ahalyabāi, and because of his sacred office he was forgiven, and permitted to appear at court. After that no more is heard of him. From the rest an oath of allegiance was taken, and, after being severely reprimanded, they were set free.

It is said that Raghobā so brooded over his failure, his capture, that he determined to stir up the Rājpuṭs against Ahalyabāi. But again the Queen was aware of his intentions and made every preparation to repel an invasion of her territory. She called together her leading men, men who were devoted and loyal to her. Each man's face shone with his love and reverence for his Queen. In stirring noble words she thanked them for past service and appealed to them to help her preserve the kingdom intact. And each one gave his oath joyously.

Tukoji was Ahalyabāi's commander-in-chief. He was of low caste, but a splendid general, and raised the Indore army to a remarkable state of efficiency. The Queen called Bhonsla, Sindhia and Baroda to aid her. At once the Gaekwar sent twenty thousand men, Bhonsla put himself and his army at her command, and Sindhia sent swift messengers saying: "Here am I at thy bidding."

Rāghoba, with the Rājput armies, approached and boldly invaded Indore. They possessed themselves of Nimbhaira and forced the Governor to fly. Ahalyabāi

sent Tukoji, Sindhia and Shribhāi to help the Governor. She followed more slowly with the bulk of her splendid army. Before she reached Nimbhaira, Tukoji had driven out the Rājputs and retaken it. The Rājputs saw that they would have no chance of success against so powerful an army and wisely retreated.

Later on, a third time, Ahalyabāi had trouble with Rāghoba. He demanded money from her, knowing that her treasury was filled to overflowing with surplus revenues.

"I am in straits," wrote Rāghoba, "send me money—thy treasuries will not feel the loss."

"What lies in the treasury is dedicated to the service of Shri Krshna," answered the Queen—"to deeds of love and mercy in His name. Thou art a Brahman, and if thou art in sore need I will give thee charity."

"Charity, charity!" exclaimed the offended Rāghoba. "I will go and take what I want!"

He led an army into Indore. Ahalyabāi went to meet him dressed in full armour; with her went five hundred women attendants, but not a single man.

Rāghoba did not know what to make of it.

"Where is your army?" he demanded.

"How can we fight against the Peshwas, when of old we were their servitors. If thou wilt, kill

me—thus mayst thou win my wealth ; otherwise not one single coin shalt thou touch."

Rāghoba had the grace to feel ashamed of himself and went away.

The fame of Ahalyabāi rests not so much with her far-seeing statesmanship, nor her ability in war, but in her splendid power to rule peaceably and to bring growth and prosperity to her kingdom.

When she ascended the throne Thugs and Dacoits were still the scourge of the country. The Queen promised that to him who would rid the country of these pests she would give her one precious daughter. Jaswant Rao, a young man of noble birth did this most successfully, and was in consequence regarded as a hero. It was a difficult and dangerous task and one that taxed his strength and igenuity to the utmost. But he returned from his quest triumphant, and married fair Machchābāi, and in their happiness the Queen rejoiced.

Though Ahalyabāi appointed only the ablest men as judges yet to her came all final appeals. Oppression to her was odious, and she punished the oppressor heavily.

A rich man of the Basia village died, and left to his widow immense wealth. She desired to adopt a child ; this the revenue officer tried to prevent. He wanted her wealth to go to the State, which it could not if she adopted a child. Ahalyabāi heard what was

happening ; she severely reprimanded the officer and told the widow she was at liberty to do as she wished.

Again, two rich men died childless. Their widows, sorrowing, no longer caring for life, for luxury, laid their great wealth at the feet of their Queen. They wanted to be free of the responsibility of it, free to wander on long pilgrimages seeking solace in religious practices and austerities.

"Ah, sisters," said Ahalyabāi gently, "life were simple indeed could we thus shirk our duties. I require not this wealth, I have enough. But take it yourselves, go, find those places where there are no tanks for the dusty thirsty people, where there are no places of charity for the poor. Benefit thy country in all wise ways with the wealth that destiny has entrusted to thee."

The two widows blessed her and went and did as she bade them.

Ahalyabāi lived very simply. She did not indulge in useless finery, but saved her money for use in all kinds of public works. She built many temples, for she firmly believed that religion and prosperity went hand in hand. Her greatest temple was the still famous Vishṇupāḍa at Gaya. Every Hindū tries to visit it at least once in his life and pray there for the welfare of his ancestors.

Ahalyabāi did not forget even the birds and animals. Every village had its plot of land where bird and

beast could go unmolested. Old and useless domestic animals were taken care of.

One great sorrow clouded the later years of the Queen's reign—her loved daughter became a Sati on the death of her husband.

At seventy years of age Ahalyabāi passed away, mourned deeply by all. Her memory is still revered, still cherished—as the old astrologer foretold.

AN AMBITIOUS VILLAGE MAIDEN

Like thousands of other little villages in India that of Madkūl clustered under the big pepal and mango trees. The mud huts with their thatched roofs were just as might be found throughout the length and breadth of the land, and around on all sides stretched the flat lands where the farmers grew rice and corn and little patches of other crops. Preṭal was only one of the many village girls in Madkūl; brought up just as they, no better, no worse, with scant attention to her education and less to her remarkable beauty.

Preṭal had scrambled as a naked babe about the mud floors and the swept alleys; only when she was a wild little lass of five or six, with a tangle of black hair flying about her face, did she attain to the honour of a skirt and by degrees to a skimpy jacket. For her father was a poor farmer, one of myriads of such, and had no spare money to spend on frivolities for his daughter. The sole indication that Preṭal was beautiful was shown by the clumsy preference of the village boys for her over the other girls. That was all; and none of the slow-brained villagers could have dreamed of the future that was in store for her.

Preṭal was about twelve years old or perhaps a little more when a Brahman priest passed through Madkūl. He had made many pilgrimages, had mingled with high and low alike, and understood the world and the values it put upon many things, and especially upon a woman's beauty—and Preṭal's beauty struck him as being of the rarest and most exquisite kind. He pondered how to turn that beauty to his own and her advantage. Very subtly he instilled into her mind endless tales of the pleasures of the wealthy and the charms of luxury ; he told her of women who, far less beautiful than she, yet claimed princes as slaves, and to whom wealth and jewels flowed as easily as rivers flow into the sea. For such women was no drudgery, they ruled as queens with myriads of servants to obey them, to attend their every whim and caprice. Ah ! if only some great prince could see her, he surely would make her his queen and give her everything that would be fit setting for her beauty.

The priest ended by completely winning Preṭal, and roused in her a fatal ambition. When he saw that it was so, he then told her that her uncouth village ways and speech, her lack of polish and education would seriously mar her chances. Preṭal begged him to teach her, and she willingly learnt from him music and dancing, and set to work to read and improve her mind in order to be ready for the

magic change that the priest assured her the future would bring to her.

After a while the priest felt that Preṭal could go on by herself, and it was not wise to delay for Preṭal was old enough to be married, and he feared her parents might arrange something for her and so put serious obstacles in the way of his schemes. He went out to find some one who would pay a high price for the beauty he had discovered. He visited court after court, but was not altogether satisfied with the offers made to him, and came at last to the Rājā of Bijnagar—then a powerful prince—and poured into his royal ears an extravagant account of the lovely village girl. The Rājā's imagination was caught at once; he would have Preṭal and make her his wife.

Very much elated at his success the priest, on his way back to Madkūl, went over the very generous terms the prince had offered, and each time with increasing satisfaction. When he arrived he at once sought out Preṭal and proudly put before her the magnificent offer of a Prince's hand. He dwelt upon the wealth and importance of the Rājā and how great would be her position as his wife . . . To his absolute amazement the farmer's daughter refused to listen to his offer!

"Why—why," stammered the priest, "are you mad? Such an offer—to be a Rāṇi! Do you understand what you are doing?"

"Quite," answered pretty Pretal coolly, "but I have other ends in view!"

Of a truth she had learnt her lessons well—and the chagrined priest cursed himself for having taught her first. That could have come after the marriage. "What can you do?" he asked, utterly puzzled.

"To be the wife of a Rājā is all very well," said Pretal, with a toss of her lovely head, "but to be the Begum of a great Mohammedan ruler is better still."

The priest was staggered. Her ambition did indeed soar high!

"But you have no one to help you in such a scheme," he said discouragingly.

"Have no fear," returned Pretal. "I shall do it!"

All the same she had no idea as to how to set to work to realize her ambition—and the priest made no offer to help her; but he at once apprised the Rājā of the failure of his plans.

The Rājā was so annoyed at the idea of losing such a beauty, as well as by her wish to have a Mohammedan husband, that he resolved to carry her off by force. He sent five thousand troops under one of his cleverest generals to bring to him Pretal and her family.

Pretal had evidently kept her family in entire ignorance of all that was passing, for when the troops appeared her father had not the smallest notion that

it was an embassy for his daughter with an offer to promote her to the highest and most honoured position possible. He thought it was a plundering, marauding party which would spare neither his crops nor his family, so he took his wife and children and with the rest of the villagers fled into the jungle. The general was so angry over the disappearance of the girl that he savagely pillaged and murdered in the surrounding villages. He returned empty-handed, and the Rājā was wild with disappointment.

In Southern India at that time there were two great rivals—Bījnagar and Kalberga. The ruler of Bījnagar was a Hinḍū and intensely proud. He lacked nothing of that inordinate sense of superiority that is one of the strongest characteristics of the high-caste Hinḍū—whose ancestors are supposed to have emerged from out the night of Time as favoured sons of the Lord of the Universe.

Kalberga was Mohammedan under Feroze, who arrogantly called himself Al Ghazī—the Victorious. In all the history of Mohammedan rule Feroze looked upon his own reign as the most gorgeous, the most brilliant. He was an educated man, remarkably so, and an extremely able general. His taste for the arts had been very carefully cultivated and he was a renowned patron of poetry and philosophy, and himself gave lectures on logic as well as on botany and geometry.

But while thus superior in many ways to the generality of rulers of his time, Feroze possessed two of the most characteristic vices of Mohammedan princes and kings—the craving for wine and the insatiable desire for beautiful concubines. "Feroze," says Sir Edward Sullivan, "was the most splendid polygamist of history. He received into his harem in one day three hundred women, and despatched agents to all parts of the world to purchase slaves to replenish the vacancies caused by death or a change of taste. He built a harem at Ferozabād on the banks of the Beemah, that was a city in itself. Here he secluded the most beautiful women of the known world, houris from Araby, Circassia, Georgia, Turkey, Russia, Europe and China vied in voluptuous charms with the high caste races of India; with each he conversed in her own tongue, and so equal was he in the distribution of his favours, that each lady of the Zenana believed herself the most-beloved of the Sultān."

That the Rājā of Bījnagar should have dared attempt to capture a Mohammedan subject enraged Feroze beyond measure. He promptly ordered an attack on Bījnagar itself, and so surprised the Rājā that the foes were actually in the streets before he could prepare to meet them. Once his troops were in hand he succeeded in forcing the Mohammedans to retreat. But for about four months the whole country

was ravaged by the two armies, and innumerable captives taken by the Mohammedans.

At last the Rājā, tired of useless devastation, asked for peace. The conditions imposed by Feroze were characteristic—the Rājā's daughter, and with her a dowery of "ten lakhs of pagodas, immense quantities of the pearls of Ceylon, fifty choice elephants, together with two thousand men and women, singers, dancers and musicians".

Feroze now turned his attention to the cause of all the trouble; Pretal was brought to him. He was silent—astounded at her beauty. He, the connoisseur, could find no words in which to express his admiration for her remarkable, her superlative loveliness.

"Ah!" he at last exclaimed, "surely those who have described this maiden's beauty are in league with Shaitān [1] himself, what they have said of her is but a tissue of lies. They have not even attempted to describe her glorious charm and beauty."

Feroze regretted his lost youth, he turned with a sigh from the radiant beauty before him, and with marvellous self-denial said he would make her the wife of his son and heir, Houssain. He sent for Houssain, and pointing to the village beauty asked him if he was willing to have her as his bride. The Prince gazed upon her and was straightway enchanted. He swore fervently that he was her slave, to whom

[1] The Devil.

her wish would be law. A magnificent marriage followed, Feroze himself giving the bride away.

Pretal's seemingly impossible ambitions were thus realized to the full—almost! Out of the humble mud village and the simple honest farming life her beauty had taken her right into the midst of one of the greatest courts of the day to be one of its leading ladies, and certainly its loveliest, for not one of the celebrated beauties could vie with her; she was unrivalled and unequalled, though perhaps the lowliest born of them all.

But the Rājā of Bijnagar was exceedingly wroth at the slight that a peasant girl had put upon him. He very carefully prepared his revenge. Feroze heard of his preparations and rejoiced. He was only too glad to go to war with his rival—and this time he hoped to crush him completely. An excuse for quarrelling was soon found and the armies of the two states were before long actively engaged.

Feroze began by beseiging Bilkondal fortress, but could not take it. Unhappily an epidemic ravaged his troops and disheartened them. At this juncture the Rājā appeared and fell upon the decimated army, and after a horrid battle the Mohammedans were almost exterminated. Then the Hindū army burnt and pillaged in every direction—with keen satisfaction no doubt, for it was the first great victory of the Hindūs over the Mohammedans in Southern India.

Feroze was so miserable over his defeat—he had deemed himself invincible—that he retired to his capital, where he gave himself up to ceaseless brooding over the disaster. He soon died.

Pretal was now the Queen of a great monarch, her wildest ambitions realized. Had Houssain Khān been of the same strong character as his father she might long have reigned as such, but—he was not. He was weak of will and fierce of temper. His uncle coveted the throne, seized it, and found but little resistance. He established himself as ruler. He did not perpetrate upon the deposed Houssain any of the usual dreadful outrages nor murder him ; he merely sent him to the famous Zenāna City on the Beemah, and gave him a splendid allowance and crowds of servants, and so enabled him to keep up an appearance of much dignity and magnificence—within his circumscribed area of eight square miles.

Of course Pretal went with him, and so was entirely removed from circles where her beauty might have proved dangerous. Probably the hidden goodness in her heart kept her from brooding over her lost state, probably she loved her husband, and that kept a check upon her ambitions ; but at all events she was a true and faithful wife, seemingly content, always cheerful and never repining over what might have been—had Houssain been different.

A FAITHFUL WIFE

JASMĀ's parents were very poor, but they were exceedingly honest, upright and self-respecting people. They lived in a village in Mālwā and were proud of their unsullied though humble ancestry. Little Jasmā early showed promise of great beauty. Her complexion was fair and delicate, her face a tender exquisite oval, and radiant as the full-moon. Her eyes were bright as stars, her soft lips rose-red, and her hair flowed luxuriant in rippling purple mists—"her beauty was equal to that of the ravishing Apsarās of Indra's Court". Jasmā always spoke gently, and was taught to conduct herself according to the ancient ideals, and to be chaste and pure and honourable; such were the very earliest lessons inculcated by her parents.

Jasmā was of the Oṛ caste, whose hereditary work was to quarry and to dig tanks and wells. So a husband was chosen for her in the same caste, Tīkam, who was a headman with several thousand Oṛs under him. Jasmā loved Tīkam with an eager absorbing love.

Rājā Siddhārāj of Pātannagar, in eastern Gujerāt, wished to make a big tank in honour of the

"Thousand-named One". He sent for the Oṛs from Mālwā. Tikam with his wife and two thousand Oṛs came to dig the tank; and soon they were busily engaged in the preliminary excavations.

One day at 'shadow-time' Rājā Siddhārāj sat upon a chair on the edge of the tank to watch the labourers at their work. The women carried away in flat baskets the earth dug out by the men. Jasmā was among them doing her share of the work. She passed and repassed with the other women near to where the Rājā sat. She kept her face averted and half covered, but at last the Rājā noticed her. At first he did not see her face—"but even if the moon is covered by clouds it cannot be hidden"; as "lightning flashes out on a dark night so out from the dust of her work and her soiled clothes shone Jasmā's beauty". The Rājā contrived to catch a glimpse of her face, he watched her graceful form and he realized that she was glorious. His passion was aroused; he wanted her for his own.

Jasmā was then only eighteen years old, but already the wisdom of womanhood was in large measure hers, and was strengthened by the teachings of her girlhood. She was not tempted by the bribes, the lures that men sometimes held out to her. She was a rare jewel indeed, and therefore many coveted her.

The Rājā beckoned to her, called to her, but she, 'being a chaste wife,' was indifferent to his calls.

Why should she go? The Rājā was nothing to her! She went on serenely with her work. The Rājā made no further effort to attract her attention, but he had fallen passionately in love with the beautiful girl. He could neither eat nor sleep nor attend to his state duties—he wanted the day to come again that he might at least watch Jasmā. He tried to think out a plan that would prove enticing to her, and bring her to him without force. Surely fine clothes and jewels and all the luxuries of a palace would tempt her. He would try.

Next day he went again to the tank, he called a man.

"Go," he ordered, "to that woman Jasmā and tell her: You are the wife of the Or who is chief over all these men; you should not carry baskets of earth upon your head—it is not fit work for you!"

"We are labourers," Jasmā answered, "to carry such is our duty, and in it I have no shame."

"But," returned the Rājā, "instead of this unpleasant work, come to the palace, where there is everything to make you comfortable."

"I have no desire to go to the palace," replied Jasmā, a little sharply.

But the Rājā was not to be daunted. The next day he went himself to Jasmā.

"You are too delicate," he said, "to work so hard. See, your dainty hands are getting dirty, your moon-like face is red from stress of labour, your clothes are

spoilt with perspiration. Why do you not come to my palace, where there is a separate house awaiting you, where there are surroundings fit for your beauty ?"

"Mahārāj !" exclaimed Jasmā, "put aside such thoughts. I do not want to go to your palace. I serve my husband—the happiest of all service ! To see my husband is joy enough for me, more than even Swarga can offer."

"Jasmā, I promise you even greater joy," declared the Rāja, "I will make you my Rāṇi—you will be queen over all Pātan ; throughout the city your word will be law. You can have many slaves for your personal attendants. You can recline upon softest cushions . . . Now your fate is to go about in sun, heat, cold and rain ; you eat dry bread and sleep upon the ground. Instead of all that I offer you every luxury, every pleasure, the gratification of every whim."

But Jasmā was not to be tempted. The Rāja tried every possible tactics ; he enticed, he threatened, he swore, but his words had no more effect upon Jasmā than water has upon an oily surface. But she wearied of his importunities, turned upon him angrily :

"Enough, enough !" she cried, "cease, Mahārāj. I do not wish to have my ears further polluted by your words. You are protector of your subjects and should cherish them in every way. Are you not ashamed to speak such evil words ? Is this a

Rājā's duty! . . . I am a faithful wife—I cannot listen to you. Why are you laying up remorse for yourself? My body is as the goddess Agni gave it me; my husband as the Shāstras have decreed—how then can I change either. 'The son that is born cannot be given back to the gods'—my body is my husband's, given to him by every sacred rite—how then can I give it to another. I do not hunger for happiness—I have enough; I do not hanker after the pleasures of your palace. Even if I do have but dry bread—what then? I am content. I shall never leave my husband—you can take my life if you will, but of what use will that be to you?"

The Rājā was in despair. He went back to the palace and called his Divān, to whom he disclosed all his wishes, all his resolve to have Jasmā—to marry her! He offered the old minister an enormous bribe to assist him in the matter.

But the Divān was not that kind of man; he had in him no greed that a bribe however large would tempt him to any disgraceful proceedings. He was an old servant of the Rājā's family—cautious, clever and wise. He reasoned with the Rājā, tried to show him how scandalous a thing it was that he contemplated, and advised him to marry into some noble family. But the Rājā would not listen to him, so he went sadly away leaving the young man to his own hot-headed schemes.

Meanwhile Jasmā told her husband everything, and how she feared for her honour if they stayed in Pātannagar. She urged him to leave the place without delay for she felt that the Rājā would not hesitate to force her into compliance with his will. Tikam got ready at once. He and Jasmā and some of the other Oṛs stole away quietly shortly after midnight and turned their faces towards their own country.

Early in the morning the news of their flight was brought to the Rājā. He hastily got ready, ordered a few armed horsemen to follow, and went after the fugitives. They soon caught up with them, and the Rājā promptly fell upon the defenceless little band. Soon most of the Oṛs lay dead, and the Tikam too fell mortally wounded. Before the Rājā could do anything to prevent it, Jasmā had plunged a dagger into her own breast and she fell beside her dying husband.

"Go, evil one," she gasped "I go with my loved one to Swarga . . . I am safe, for I am with him—and—may thy tank be cursed and no water ever stay in it!"

The Rājā tried to snatch one kiss from Jasmā's sweet lips before they grew cold in death—but ere he could touch them she was dead.

It is said that in the tank no water ever stayed, no matter how heavily it rained.

A MODERN INCIDENT

"But, Miss Sahib, you ought to know," persisted Punna.

"But I don't know, Punna. How should I know? I am not married!"

"I want a son," repeated Punna ignoring the point.

A son, a son—that was the whole cry of her life, the passionate longing of every waking hour, the persistent nightmare of her dreams. No son!

"English people know everything," she went on, "can't you tell me what to do?"

She looked up entreatingly with great tear-filled eyes into the pale pitying English face.

Tears rose to Ella Thompson's own eyes. She felt keenly how utterly powerless she was to answer such an appeal. She looked away, across the blue waters of the lake, so deliciously lovely where the delicate pink lotus blooms swayed in the light breeze, away to where on the hillside nestled the ruins of the old Peri Mahal—the Fairy Palace.

Then she looked back at Punna sitting at her feet on the flat, carpeted floor of the boat. She could not

help thinking how essentially motherly Punna looked, and yet the one thing a married Hindū woman craves for had been denied her.

A great deep brooding was in the dark eyes, and the English woman could readily imagine how they could shine with tenderest love for wee nestling babes. And surely that wide ample bosom was meant to pillow tired little heads, and those gentle hands to guide tottering footsteps. A sudden longing to help Punna in some way seized Ella Thompson, and an inspiration—a wild scheme—flashed into her head. But she had enough commonsense to check herself and say quietly :

" Punna, have you been to the hospital to see the lady doctor there ? Perhaps she could tell you why no child has come to you."

Punna abruptly ceased trailing her hand idly through the water and watching the glittering drops roll from the broad green lotus leaves. She clasped her hands round her knees and looking at Ella with very troubled eyes said :

" But Miss Sahib I don't want to know that ; I want a son. That is all ! "

" Then," persisted Ella, trying to drown her inspiration in practical suggestions, " you might go just the same and consult her."

" No, no," answered Punna vehemently, " I do not want to consult her—I want a son ! "

She could not say more than that, do no more than voice the long pain that lived with her night and day. She could tell to no one the cruel fact that no child could come to her husband, whether she was his wife or another. But how should she explain that to this unmarried English girl. Besides, her Indian custom demanded that she should not discuss her husband. But, oh, how she wanted a babe all her own!

Ella felt very troubled. She knew how great a calamity it was for an Indian family to lack one son at least. No other could free the man from the bonds that fasten about the soul during its stay 'twixt earth and heaven. Without a son to utter those liberating invocations he must wander tormented and weary in the world of shades, till time brought release. She could realise a little how terrible the prospect was to Punna, but she could not know how awful and paralysing the idea of such a future for her husband was to the quiet, gentle Hindū woman. For Punna loved her husband. She caught the look of understanding in Ella's eyes.

"You know Miss Sahib how we think it so imperative that a man should have a son."

"I know, I know," said Ella, "and I am so sorry that I can do nothing. Oh, I do wish I were not so helpless . . ." Again the inspiration flashed into her brain, and she caught her breath sharply, and shut her lips tightly. For a while she watched the

swaying lotuses and inhaled their delicious fragrance. After a few minutes though, and in spite of herself, she said abruptly :

" If only there were real fairies ! I wonder if they would listen to one's wishes—just as they did in the dear fairy-tales of one's childhood. How perfectly lovely a real generous fairy god-mother would be ! "

" What are you talking about, Miss Sahib," asked Punna wonderingly. " I do not understand."

" You know what fairies—peris—are, don't you ? "

" O, yes."

" Well, I was just wishing that we could go up to the old Peri Mahal and wish for a wee son for you, and that the kind fairies who help us human beings in our sorrows would bring you a lovely babe."

Punna did not answer, but Ella caught the deep light glowing in her eyes and promptly regretted that she had blurted out her wild fancy. Now she had merely rubbed the wound afresh and knew of no healing balm that she could apply.

Punna put her head upon her knees and kept silent. She thought of past years, of dark hours lit only by some such thought as Ella's, some wild fancy, some improbable fantasy that she lived in for a few vivid moments and then had suffered hours of dull and bitter reality. She had prayed to every God whom she thought might have a hand in such matters. She had longed that some poor mother over-burdened

with sons might leave just one at her doorway, or even that some little toddling waif might come whom she could claim. Had she not gone long pilgrimages and prayed to the goddesses, and dreamed each time of a miracle-babe floating from out the arms of the living image into her own longing clasp! Had she not endured penances and fasted till her imagination ran riot and wove a dream-child, so perfect, so real, that her heart ached more than ever when the sweet fancy melted away and left her but the horrible emptiness! How many passing Yogis she had implored for a charm that would bring to her the coveted male child to brood over, and cherish into sturdy youth. Oh! to be a mother, just to be a mother—to possess wholly and solely one child out of all the world's countless thousands!

While Punna went over all the long round of thoughts that haunted her ceaselessly and had furrowed that slender line between her delicate level brows, Ella was thinking busily too. The fancy of the babe being brought by the fairies of the Peri Mahal had taken hold of her mind.

"Punna," she asked suddenly, "would you go with me to-morrow to the Peri Mahal? I have a strange feeling that something may happen if we do. Will you go?"

"Yes, Miss Sahib," answered Punna simply. Her heart gave a great throb of hope. The improbability

of anything happening did not occur to her. She would go cheerfully on the wildest, maddest quest in which gleamed even the tiniest ray of hope. "Of course there may be nothing at all in my odd fancy," laughed Ella a little nervously, "so don't be disappointed if nothing happens."

"That will not be unusual," answered Punna sadly.

Ella's heart misgave her. But the sense of conviction that something would happen was so strong that it impelled her to the crazy adventure.

"Then I will arrange that we go to Peri Mahal to-morrow afternoon. I will ask for a dooly for you." Then suddenly and gravely she finished: "And we'll see if we cannot tempt the gods to answer your long faithful prayers."

Punna gave no reply; she simply turned and looked at Ella, and Ella was startled to see in her dark eyes how profound and undying a gratitude had already sprung to life in her heart for even this faint gleam of hope.

By this time the boat had arrived at the Nishāt Bāgh landing-place. Punna enveloped herself in her shapeless *burka*, crossed the road, and disappeared through the guarded gateway of the garden. She was a guest of some friends who were staying in the airy house that spans the lovely waterway where it tumbles into a stone pond before pouring beneath the roadway and out into the lake.

Ella watched Punna disappear and then she turned and went into her house-boat which was tied up at the landing-place. Her mind was very busy with plans and fears for the result of to-morrow, to which were added odd thrills of hope and an unaccountable sense of certainty.

The next afternoon Ella, mounted on a sturdy Yarkandi pony, followed slowly after the closely curtained dooly in which Punna sat, outwardly calm, but really shivering with repressed hopes and longings.

Their progress was slow up the winding pathway leading to the Peri Mahal. It was a stiff climb for the dooly bearers, but they plodded on steadily and the Fairy Palace grew clearer and more distinct with every step.

In spite of her fears Ella enjoyed her ride for every turn in the zigzag road gave her fresh views of the exquisite Dāl lake below—the daintiest and most perfect among all Kashmīr's beauty spots. She could not help thinking that the squat ruins of the Peri Mahal were indeed an appropriate place to seek a magic happening. Whispered legend said that long, long ago a wicked magician had lived there. Great indeed was his power and dreadful the evil he wrought. He used to spirit away the dream-bodies of the daughters of Kings—and there was mourning in many palaces. One King told his daughter that

if ever she should be forced to go to the magician, she must bring away a chenar leaf that they might be able to trace the evil-doer. She did so. Then arose in their wrath all the great chiefs of India, and they fell upon the wicked magician and his power availed him nothing for they tore him to pieces.

As they neared their goal Ella could not help feeling excited ; and she knew perfectly well that the beautiful dark-eyed woman ahead was already singing a song of joy in her heart. What if nothing happened ? Ella shrank from the thought. But what after all should happen ! It was just a passing fancy—and here they were following it—to what end ? Punna's disappointment would be colossal, she knew. Could she have looked into Punna's heart, she would have received a shock that would have sent her to her knees praying for dear life to the Gods to be merciful and break not this longing human heart.

At last they reached the top level of the Peri Mahal, where the masonry had crumbled level with the ground. Ella slipped quickly from her pony and the syce led it away ; she then went to the dooly, made the men put it down and retire to a distance. Then she helped Punna out. As soon as they were behind some sheltering bushes and heaps of ruin, Punna threw back the stifling *burka* from her face. She gripped Ella's hand with her own little cold trembling ones and looking up at Ella said in a low voice :

"Oh! Miss Sahib pray; pray that something will happen, that my heart's desire be granted."

"I will, Punna, I will," said Ella fervently. At the same time she felt a little afraid that the intense pitch of excitement to which Punna had reached might have serious results when re-action set in. How she regretted having set out upon such a mad escapade! What would the years hold for Punna? A ghostly emptiness—and it would be her fault. But with Punna's glowing eyes upon her, she had to pretend to be sanguine, despite her fears.

"Just be brave, Punna," she said with affected cheerfulness, "never mind what happens—it will be for the best."

"Yes, yes," answered Punna quickly, "but I have prayed so long, so long—God must answer at last—mustn't He?"

"Let us go on anyhow," said Ella evading the question. "Let us see if after all the fairies have heard our call, and will justify our faith in them."

They went forward hand in hand down the crumbling steps to the next level. Punna started violently and Ella's heart gave a leap as a covey of partridges whirred suddenly out of some bushes.

For a moment they stood holding each others' hands tightly. Then the tension relaxed a little and they took a few steps forwards towards the steps that led down to another terrace. A tiny cooing sound

struck upon their ears! Punna's hands gripped Ella's so hard that it pained her. They did not dare to look at each other, but forcing themselves to go slowly they went on and down the steps, Punna looking with keen eager eyes into every corner. How their hearts beat, Ella felt as though she would suffocate. Had they imagined that sound?—or was it the breeze murmuring through the broken walls!

They reached the level—and were greeted with the unmistakable gurgle of a happy babe. There it was! Just a dear little naked thing lying on a rough mat and kicking and grabbing at the branches tossing in the light breeze above its head.

Punna dropped Ella's hands, clasped her own together in amazed delight, and then with a deep gasp of exquisite relief rushed straight to the baby and picked him up and pressed him to her in an embrace that gave vent to the denial of the past sad years; she kissed the child's forehead and he gazed at her solemnly for a space while she smiled at him divinely. Then his baby face broke suddenly into happy smiles, and he kicked and grabbed delightedly at the golden chains about her neck.

Ella had stood still almost unconscious of herself—it seemed so like a dream—then she found her face was wet with tears. When she had wiped them away, she saw that Punna had taken the child by the waist and had planted his little feet upon her bosom

so that the happy baby face was higher than her own and his little hands waved free. There was such adoration in Punna's face, that she knew that there and then she was witnessing the dedication of an immeasurable mother-love to the service of the child—it was the apotheosis of childhood!

After a few minutes Punna lifted the child down and he straddled across her hips. They came towards Ella, who, western and practical, had already begun to fear what would happen when the real mother should appear and claim her child. She couldn't be far away, for the child seemed well-fed and content.

"See, Miss Sahib, see my lovely babe," said Punna proudly.

A sudden smart of tears were in Ella's eyes. She could not answer, so she took the baby's hand and kissed it. The little fellow drew back and cuddled his curly head against Punna's breast, and Punna was filled with a joy that was almost pain.

Ella summoned all her courage: "But Punna, you do not know whose baby it is!"

"It is mine,"—answered Punna simply.

"We will wait awhile, anyhow, and see if anyone comes for it."

"No one will come for him, he is mine," said Punna holding him with jealous closeness. "The Gods have given him to me,"

All the same Ella insisted upon waiting, so they sat upon the grass, Punna playing with the laughing little fellow.

But the shadows were beginning to lengthen, and there seemed no one in sight. Reluctantly Ella rose, and declared they must return before dusk fell.

Punna took the child and carried him proudly, confident that he was hers for all her life. She stepped into the dooly, and the men were amazed to hear the voice of a babe from beneath her *burka*, but they said nothing.

They went back silently through the gathering shadows, and Ella wondered what was to come of it all. She imagined a frantic mother who could not find her babe, and she thought that the burden of misery would merely be transferred to another and nothing gained.

They made many inquiries—not Punna, the child was hers. But the days passed and they heard nothing. Then the ceremonies were performed that made the child of Punna's own caste. Her faith had won!

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